



Lower Blue Mountains Conservation Society

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JULY: AUGUST NEWSLETTER

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1983

EDITORIAL.

Conservationists('wise users of the environment') have lost many battles in the past but a most worthwhile victory took place recently in the High Court of Australia. The Franklin and Gordon Rivers have been saved from a "damned" existence - congratulations to Dr. Bob Brown and his wilderness workers and supporters. Success is much sweeter when it is hard won.

Many lessons are possible from this 7-year confrontation but the primary message resulting from the High Court decision is that environmental parameters were inconsequential; only legal considerations were deliberated, initiated by political pressure.

While true that, political pressure was instigated by the South-west's unique and picturesque charm, these characteristics didn't win the day. Only sheer muscle and grunt in the Federal election demonstrated conservationists' solidarity. Perhaps the "Green Revolution" shared, at this time, common aims and objectives of the more traditional revolutions.

Another "battle" won, but how many lost? The "war" is far from over. A united, concerted approach is called for; a piecemeal approach will simply remain inconsequential. It doesn't matter how right we might be, there are no prizes for second place. As "wise users" we had better "wise-up" - facts not fiction or hearsay, political clout and good media presentation are the ingredients for victory.

To Dr. Bob Brown

Rush on Wild River, you now in safety may.
Through your rocky gorges flow strong and free.
In the quiet places sing softly,
But in the splendid cataracts shout loudly
A paean to one who, like Horatius in the brave
Days of old, stood and faced the vandal horde
And their vandal Lord.
Praise too, those who stood on either hand
And helped to win the day.

So Wild River, may God for ever speed you
On your wild and lonely way.

Composed by M. Edmonds L.B.M.C.S.

COMING EVENTS

Friday, August 5th Leura Convention Centre, Public Hearing

The Society's submission to B.M.C.C. was as follows;

"The L.B.M.C.S. raises objection to the proposed Leura Convention Centre which is being accommodated by the Draft Local Environmental Plan currently being exhibited.

Our grounds for objection are as follows;

1. The land was originally in public ownership and given to the Leura Golf Club for its present use (public recreation). The Draft L.E.P. proposes to re-zone the subject land for use by private commercial interests with substantial financial benefit to the Golf Club. This raises very serious questions over the long-term plight of all public land which has been vested in the interests of single organisations.
2. The Society does not believe that serious consideration has been given to alternative sites.
3. The site occupies a critical escarpment situation. Several important habitats that occur below the actual construction area must be considered and it must not be assumed that because the species on the site are found elsewhere that development on one site will not impair their overall survival. It depends on whether all species are protected in nature conservation reserves. This approach is well-accepted in natural resource management and has been outlined by the Specht Report, 1970.
4. Whilst the environmental effects may be negligible after the construction phase, the short-term effects would be sufficient to be detrimental to the hydrology and habitats of adjoining and adjacent bushland and the National Park, in the longer term.
5. The proposal would interfere with the use of some public recreation other than golfing activities.
6. There will be a substantial increase in demand for services which are already over-taxed eg water supply and sewage disposal. This will place a further strain on the Blue Mountains hydrological network.

The Society understands that a Public Hearing is to be held to assess submissions on the Draft L.E.P. We formally request to be heard at that Hearing at which time we will expand on each of our grounds of objection. We will supplement a verbal statement at the Hearing with a further written submission.

The Society is concerned that many people who have made submissions to Council may not be able to participate in the Hearing unless they have made a formal request to do so. In the interests of natural justice and because the Hearing was announced in the local press which appeared 3 days before the closing date for receipt of submissions, we urge that the following procedure is adopted prior to the Hearing;

- that an advertisement is placed in the local press advising that those people who wish to be heard at the hearing should register by a specified date at all Council offices.
- Registrants will then have leave to appear at the Hearing together with those people who requested a Hearing in their original submissions to Council. Council will of course be advising the latter residents by correspondence of their automatic right to appear at the Hearing.

This procedure was adopted at the Penrith Lakes Commission of Inquiry and proved more appropriate than adhering to a strict interpretation of Section 68 of the E. & P. Assessment Act, 1979. We urge that our suggestion is relayed to the appointed Commissioner for the Hearing."

MONTHLY MEETINGS - REVISED PROCEDURE

So that members who cannot make it to Works Meetings can raise any matter that they feel should be investigated by the Society, the first 30 minutes of Monthly Meetings has been allocated for that purpose. A Business Report will also be submitted during that time. Guest speakers will commence at 8.30pm. Thanks to Molly and Linda for the suggestion.

REMEMBER - the venue is the Teachers Centre, Ross Street, Glenbrook

FUTURE MEETINGS

Friday, 12th August- Margaret Baker will entertain us with her 'wombat' experiences.

Friday, 9th September- a speaker on water pollution problems resulting from development in Kosciusko National Park.

BUSY, BUSY - the nitty-gritty of correspondence, policy-making, lobbying and dealing with pressing issues is handled at Works Meetings on the Monday following Monthly meetings. We monopolise the lounge room floor of the Godfrey's residence ie 7 Kent Street, Glenbrook. Thank you to those masochists who keep turning up and remember, the more, the merrier!

NEXT WALK

Sunday, 14th August - another short, but popular walk - Erskine Creek.

MEET - 10am Glenbrook Railway Station and proceed from there by car.

BRING - Lunch, wildflower books etc etc

FUND RAISING

The response to our call for saleable junk at the Ivy Market has been fantastic. Keep up the donations - and remember, dont underestimate the value of your junk! Call Aleen on 39-4079 if you would like it picked up.

PAST EVENTS-The Duckhole Walk.

Our day on 12th June was a very well attended walk to the Duckhole in Glenbrook Creek. The day was glorious, calm, winter sunshine and the party meandered steadily along the track and round about it observing what was growing, budding, flowering or moving. On looking around we found it obvious that there is quite an amount of food for birds, even though it was Winter. None of the plants flower profusely but there are Banksia brushes, Grevillea spiders, Lambertia spikes (where the bees have not punctured the tubes and robbed them of nectar) and of course the accompanying insect life. In all there were 13 varieties of shrubs counted with blossom showing and many more budding profusely for Spring.

The children in the party had great fun in the sand and water - the middle of the day being almost hot in the valley. They were greatly excited to have disturbed a marsupial mouse from amongst the rocks. Birds being very quiet at this time of the year, we saw and heard only a few.

The area is historic; the Duckhole in early days provided water for steamtrains at Wascoe siding. Remains of the foundations of an old pumping station are still visible: and it is still possible to see that the track has at one time been a built-up road to that station. Some coal remains where it had been used to fuel the pumping station. The track (ex-road) is badly eroded; but would provide an excellent short walk of beauty and interest if re-conditioned for tourist visitors.

Contributed by B. Bramsen.

Burghoffer's Pass Walk - July

A small number of members turned up for a stroll down Burghoffers Pass; the original road up to Mt. Victoria from Hartley which was in use in the early 1900's. The Lands Dept have developed the whole locality (ie around Mt. York) as a series of walking tracks. The stroll was marred by the ubiquitous trail bikes but 2 young Godfreys were intrigued by the drainage culverts that is, until the depth of one of same was underestimated. A little Godfrey became firmly entrenched within same and had to be extracted by parents much to his embarrassment. So concluded a nice little winter's day stroll.

FORUM ON BUSHFIRES - June.

This was well attended and very informative. It is pleasing to see 2 of the Ward 4 Aldermen regularly attending our Forums - aldermen can only make reasonable decisions if they are well-informed. Remember when the Bushfire Control Plan was presented to Council earlier this year for a decision - well, it was approved without so much as a hiccup!

Nevertheless, here is a precis of information that surfaced at the Forum.

Effects of fire on fauna - Mountains species are opportunistic. Therefore it makes it difficult to assess the effects of fire on

populations. One survey at Ingar revealed that before the fire no house mice (*Mus musculus*) were recorded. However, they appeared in traps after the fire. Very little is known (or can be concluded from surveys that have been carried out in the Mtns.) of how fauna populations respond to particular fire regimes but there has been some work done at Nadgee Nature Reserve on the far South Coast of N.S.W. Catling and Newsome reported the following information on the effects of wildfire on small mammals in "Heaths in N.S.W.", Parks & Wildlife July 1981;

"In December 1972, Nadgee suffered a very severe fire in which almost all the leafy vegetation in the forest and heathlands was destroyed. Detailed results of the fire have been published elsewhere (Recher et al, 1975 Newsome et al, 1975) In general the fire annihilated the populations of the two native rodents, *Rattus fuscipes* and *R. lutreolus* and the two dasyurids, *Antechinus swainsonii* and *A. stuartii*. The two species of *Rattus* disappeared from some areas immediately but the *Antechinus* species went only after the breeding season of 1973. The alien species *Mus musculus*, which had never been trapped in Nadgee before the fire appeared in the first year and was very abundant in 1974. In the subsequent years up to 1977 the two species of *Rattus* became re-established above their former population levels and *Mus musculus* reverted to being an uncommon species. *Antechinus stuartii* slowly recovered and *A. swainsonii* was still rare five years after the fire and is only just beginning to recover eight years after the fire." This is only an extract and members may care to procure the magazine (it costs about \$5.00) from N.P. & W.S. offices. Of course the patterns at Nadgee may well be different to the Blue Mountains - we need more surveys.

Thanks to the N.P. & W.S. Blackheath for providing Snr. Ranger Ann Jelinik as the speaker on this topic.

Effects of fire on flora - Ross Bradstock (Syd. University) has been studying the effects of fire on 2 species; *Banksia ericifolia* and *Acacia suaveolens*. Ross predicted that *Banksia ericifolia* will be vulnerable if fires occur at a frequency of less than 5-6 years because they don't flower and set seed within that period. *Acacia suaveolens* sets seed in 1-2 years and will die at about 15 years. A fire regime of between 5 and 50 years is better for maintaining abundance and diversity of species than more frequent (or absence of) burns. He suggested that it may be better to burn in late summer/autumn to reduce ecological impact. Also, the hotter the fire, the better the stimulation of dormant seeds. Cool fires created zero stimulation. There should be the odd fire free interval of about 15 years to allow a new generation of plants to mature and develop a fire tolerance. Responses to fire are different even between species that co-exist. High frequency burns of less than 6 years will eliminate some species (some faster than others) and those plants will be eventually replaced by herbs and grasses - which means that we could end up with more of a fire hazard than there was in the first place. Ross urged that emotional responses to this problem are dangerous and he had some opinions to offer about the problems of reducing the threat of fire to residential development where it exists adjacent to bushland.

"- arguments about natural fire regimes are largely irrelevant and insoluble.

- we may have to consciously manage to the detriment of some species in some circumstances. (its impossible to resolve good and bad on this issue).

- with detailed evaluation of fire protection requirements and vegetation characteristics, we can minimise this ie fine tune our management".

Richard Dayman from B.M.C.C. addressed the Forum on the practical aspects of planning for fire prevention. He revealed that 85% of the City is in a fire danger zone. Council was trying to discourage development on slopes greater than 1:6. Also, eastern slopes were not as safe as many thought. They were endeavouring to encourage the re-design of subdivisions so that building lots occur on the apex of the ridge with the service road encircling the houses. Council is currently formulating a policy on fire and there will be an opportunity for the public to assess the policy and to make submissions. We urge members to watch for the advertisement in the local press. We must take advantage of this opportunity to 'spark' up this issue - we must not foster approval by default. Take pen to paper; its a powerful tool.

At the conclusion of the Forum we popped some bubbly and demolished

a symbolic "Dam" cake. Thanks go to Bob Clarke who donated the bubbly.



TAS. WILDERNESS SOCIETY
130 DAVEY STREET,
HOBART PH. 34 9365

Dear people of the Blue Mountains,

I am writing on behalf of the people on the rivers to thank you for your letter of support.

It was received by them over the weekend with a supply boat which happens every fortnight only. As this is the only real contact they get with the outside world, one can imagine how important it is to have feedback as to how the world is responding to our presence.

Nicky Hungerford of Bilpin (who is currently upriver) was thrilled to learn that people from her area are still motivated and aware of our presence here.

The people are faring well, despite appalling weather conditions (it is snowing at the campsite), and remain optimistic and aggressively determined to remain in the area until the completion of the High Court procedure.

Thanks Again, and hoping for an early victory,

Your's for the Wilderness,

Alan Porritt
(Vigil Collective)

*Participants at the June Meeting were signatories to the letter from our Society. It was great to see that there was somebody from the Mtns amongst the group of "Up-riverers". Incidentally the deficit from the Franklin campaign stands at \$52,000 (as at 24.6.83). Total cost of the election campaign totalled \$202,258! Can you help with just another donation, if so it should be forwarded to the National South West Coalition, 672B Glenferrie Rd., Hawthorn Vic 3122.

URBAN BUSHLAND MANAGEMENT AND FIRE PROTECTION by W. Godfrey
I represented the Society at another Bushfire Forum titled as above, at the N.S.W. Environment Centre in Sydney. It wasn't really relevant to our area because it was concerned with fire management of small remnant bushland areas of Sydney. As Helen Petersen of S.T.E.P. (South Turramurra Env.P.) said, "Selective hand clearing is not suitable for large areas such as the Blue Mtns". Unless people are made accountable for their own 'radiation zone' and they carry out their own selective hand clearing, it is just a mammoth task to try to apply it up here; and where are the labour resources? Even membership of Bushfire Brigades wouldn't be enough.
The Blue Mtns certainly faces a dilemma and we can only hope that the decision-makers perform their task in an unbiased informed manner. I, for one, would not be entitled to claim that I had made an informed judgement of an issue unless I had fully researched and sought all points of view. It may be something for our 'hopefuls' to bear in mind at the coming Council elections.

BUSHFIRE (continued)

Bob Chapman took on the devastating task of writing a submission to the House of Reps Standing Committee of Inquiry into the Environmental Impact of Bushfire. It is an excellent, very professional submission. Thank you, Bob.

The Society recommended the following(it was accompanied by 9 pages of detailed evidence);

RECOMMENDATIONS

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1. Intensive fire hazard reduction should only be carried out in a relatively narrow zone ("radiation zone") around urban areas. Even within this zone, care should be taken to avoid special areas of scenic or ecological value.
2. Large core areas of bushland, particularly National Parks, should not be burnt for fire hazard reduction purposes. The frequency and season of allowed burning in such areas should be guided by extensive monitoring programs to check on any changes in ecology which may occur. Such monitoring programs should be set up as soon as possible.
3. As an interim measure existing knowledge on plant maturing time and susceptibility to fire of species, coupled with species lists for a given area, could provide a sound basis for estimating the effects of fire frequency. This would need the co ordination of a government body such as the N.P. and W.S.
4. Definitions of fire hazard potential or hazard rating should be developed as a basis for urban land use zoning. Such a zoning should then have authority at State or Federal level to avoid regular overturning of Local Council decisions on this. The zone could be used directly to restrict building, or indirectly by scaling insurance or other penalty costs. In the extreme, all support could be removed from those building in such zones.
5. Existing information on building methods and materials should be assembled into building codes, which would then apply in areas subject to bushfire.

CONTRIBUTIONS

Members are welcome to submit articles to the Newsletter on any matter they feel may be of interest to others.

NEXT ISSUE

"After Ash Wednesday" - a leading conservationist who has lived through severe bushfires and who actively plans fire survival techniques, talks about the lessons Australia should be learning from the 1983 disasters. From "Habitat".

SIGNING UP

Elizabeth Fagg is working on a sign advertising our Society. It will be placed at Glenbrook Railway Station - if its good enough for the Real Estate Agents, its good enough for us. Move over Henson and Bedges. Thank you Elizabeth.

T-SHIRT FUND FLOUNDERING

The response to donations for the original purchase of a B. Mtns. T-shirt (60) has been good but unless we receive further financial support from members we will have to give up the idea. Pity- because an endemic B.M. t-shirt would be very popular.

COUNCIL ELECTIONS

They're on again and the Society will be issuing a series of questions to all candidates. The questions and candidates responses will be reported in the Gazette. Its going to be a busy time for the Society and workers are needed. We will be having frequent get-togethers to cope with the workload, the first one being next Monday 8th August at 7.30 , 7 Kent St, Glenbrook again. Alternatively phone Secretary for offers of assistance.

SAVE THE TREES BILL

Less than 4% of N.S.W. is land reserved for nature conservation under the National Parks and Wildlife Act. As well, not all habitats are represented within the parks and reserves system. Therefore this places a high degree of responsibility on other statutory authorities and the land owner/manager to look after the nature conservation values of their land. The Australian Democrats have introduced a private members bill to end tax deductions now paid for the destruction of native trees. In those marginal areas, this is a long overdue move. In a country which is only 5% forested, it is ridiculous and very short-sighted to literally encourage (by financial tax incentives) people to reduce that coverage. If this Bill succeeds the trend will be reversed.

The Society has been lobbying for support for the Bill through our Federal member, Ross Free. A similar input from members would not go astray.

Youth Environment Services or Blue Mountains Pathfinders

This is a group of workers (ex-unemployed) formed from Federal grants to repair and construct specific walking and bridle tracks in the Blue Mountains. \$14,000 has been allocated to the Eastern Escarpment Walking Tracks, \$60,000 for a Bridle Track at Yellow Rock and \$70,000 for the Grand Cliff Top Walk. Many organisations, including ours have been attending the meetings and are assisting Council in the design and improvement of these tracks.

THE ENVIRONMENT OFFICER - PROCRASTINATION, POLITICS & PUBLIC SERVANTS

by W. Godfrey

I can't report here what's been going on over this simple issue. Suffice to say that the staff don't want it (it will disturb the hierarchy in Council), the Alderment can't agree on it (even though they've thought about it for 2 years) and the Budget is used as the scapegoat. If they are willing to allocate \$20,000 for Consultants, they only need another \$10,000 to cover it - but let's face it Kerb and Guttering is much more important! Anyway, you get something for your money when you spend it on material things! "What are we going to get out of it?" they cry.

Really it's such a simple request. Concord Council of all places has an Environmental Officer. There was apprehension at the need for one there at first, so the appointment was made for 3 months temporary. It was reviewed and extended several times and is now a permanent appointment. He has been involved in wildlife and vegetation surveys, pollution reduction in Parramatta River, Industrial landscaping, town planning design, environmental education, rehabilitation of remnant bushland and mangrove areas.

Yet our Council doesn't see the need for an Environmental Officer in the Blue Mountains, a City in a National Park. The whole fracas is just too silly for words! Council should be the leading light of environmental planning in the state. Instead they bicker over an issue that would only enhance their claims to such fame.

PINUS RADIATA - A MILLION HECTARE MISCALCULATION? Part 2.

In addition to being simple communities, pine plantations lack many of the resources needed by birds. There are no hollows in which to nest, nectar-rich flowers and fruits are absent and, compared to native forests, insects are scarce.

One Australian Bird that survives in pines is the Brown Thornbill, *Acanthiza pusilla*. This small insectivore is a 'generalist' which can be found foraging on a wide range of native trees and shrubs. This includes many plants, such as She-oak, Casuarina, which have foliage not unlike pine needles.

The lack of a diverse vegetation, an absence of nest hollows and restricted food sources are the reasons few birds can be expected to colonise plantations.

Just as there are few kinds of birds in the pines, there are few native mammals. Kangaroos, wallabies and wombats are abundant along the plantation roads and in the new plantings where there is grass for grazing, but the small mammals of the forest floor are absent or much less abundant than in the native forest. Where native mammals occur it is in association with edges or weedy growth of native plants.

Illusion of Abundance

Indeed, the association of wallabies and wombats with road edges creates an illusion of abundance. Move back into the pines and it is

still.

Severe Impact on Mammals

The impact of the pine programme on native mammals is much more severe than on birds. Of the 28 species of native mammals, excluding bats, recorded in montane forest in S.E. N.S.W. and East Gippsland, only 9 have been seen among the pines.

The loss of wildlife is not restricted to vertebrates. Forest invertebrates are also less abundant in pines than in native forest.

The amount of wildlife in a pine plantation can be enhanced by leaving strips or patches of native vegetation. If these are wide enough, they can support a large part of the original forest wildlife and provide resources which allow some species to use the pines. Presumably nest boxes and other forms of artificial shelter could be used to increase the number of native animals among the pines, but pine plantations will never support the variety or abundance of wildlife found in native forests.

Nonetheless scientists have reservations about the long-term survival of native plants and animals in remnants of native forest retained within an extensive pine plantation. Few of these remnants are more than 20 years old-most are small or narrow. Although some areas have a full complement of wildlife, as occurred in some stream reserves at Bombala, scientists do not know if these are viable populations. Birds may continuously colonise from forest outside the plantation and some of the larger mammals may survive for years, but not reproduce.

2,4,5-t Spraying

The environmental impact of a pine plantation does not stop with the clearing of the forest. After the pines are planted they must be protected. Weeds are sprayed with herbicides including 2,4,5-t, a chemical suspected of causing birth defects. One problem with 2,4,5-t is that it is invariably contaminated with dioxin, a powerful cancer causing agent and mutagen. Dioxin is degraded very slowly in the environment. The effects, if any, on native animals, are not known. Mature eucalypts are especially sensitive to 2,4,5-t and some areas of native forest retained in plantations have been seriously affected during the spraying of adjacent pines. In addition to weeds, there are animal pests which must be controlled. Carrots baited with the poison 1080 maybe used to control rabbits which damage young pines, but the baits are also taken by possums, wallabies, kangaroos, wombats and native rats which are also killed.

Clearing causes erosion

The clearing of forest, the construction of roads and site preparation inevitably cause erosion and can lead to the siltation of streams. To protect the pines from fire, it may be necessary to clear fire breaks and burn nearby native forests on a regular cycle.

The destruction of native forest held in trust for all Australians raises more^{the} questions of environmental impact and the loss of wildlife. The softwood programme appears to value the nation's forests for their land alone. Trees, wildlife, scenery and recreation are seemingly given no value nor assigned any importance. This is wrong. A forest is the sum of its plants and animals. It is fine to harvest the forest, but we should not measure its value solely in quantities of wood.

As a nation we have lost sight of the future and by accepting the destruction of forests set aside by earlier generations we relegate our heritage to the cash register. Aldo Leopold, who was the founder of modern wildlife management in America commented that, 'We grieve only for what we know'. The tragedy is, not enough Australians know what they are losing.

(refer last newsletter for details of the article)

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GREENPEACE

AUSTRALIA (N.S.W.)

787 George Street Sydney NSW 2000

Tel: (02) 211 0089

Telex AA24041

ROXBY DOWNS URANIUM MINE BLOCKADE

August 27th.

Dear Friends,

The Coalition for a Nuclear Free Australia is an alliance of anti-nuclear and environmental groups from across Australia. Starting on August 27th we will be staging a non-violent Blockade of the Roxby Downs mine site, in South Australia.

Roxby Downs, about 500km north-west of Adelaide is a mixed deposit of uranium, copper, silver and rare earths. It will be the largest uranium mine in the world.

The Western Mining Corporation (WMC) and British Petroleum (BP) the joint owners of the Roxby Downs project, have recently lifted estimated reserves of uranium at Roxby to one million tonnes. At present levels of consumption, this could keep the entire western world supplied with uranium for 40 years.

A loophole in the ALPs uranium policy means that new uranium mines can develop when uranium is being mined in association with other minerals. Under a Labor Government Roxby Downs is the only new Australian uranium mine which is clearly able to go ahead.

It is obvious that the dangers associated with the mining of uranium are the same whether or not it is mined together with other minerals. We are opposed to the Roxby Downs development because it is unsafe, uneconomic, environmentally unsound and will contribute to the future proliferation of nuclear weapons.

The Roxby Downs mine will be an environmental disaster. Four hundred hectares of tailings waste (about 150 football fields) will be left in the desert in mounds up to 30 metres high. These tailings will be dangerously radioactive for hundreds of 1000 s of years, contaminating the soil, water, plants, animals and people in the surrounding area. We are also concerned about the future of the Great Artesian Basin which may become polluted by radioactive ground-water.

You can help make the Blockade a success by participating in the Blockade, making a financial contribution to its running, or by telling your friends about the Blockade. Any assistance given would be greatly appreciated.

Further information may be obtained from Greenpeace Australia (NSW) at 787 George St, Sydney 2000. Telephone: (02) 211-0089.