



Lower Blue Mountains Conservation Society

AUTUMN NEWSLETTER '84

P.O. BOX 119,
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EDITORIAL

The environmentalist movement is now a major factor in the political life of Australia.

It started a long time ago as a protest against change to the local environment - over-development, fouling of waterways, destruction of wildlife habitat, polluted air etc. Thus it soon became apparent that such parochial issues were in fact widespread ones which could not be fought entirely at the local level - a more concerted campaign aimed at the core of these ailments was required. Knowledge and legal competence have become the tools of environmentalists but at the same time, an ability to muster numbers in support is vital.

Part of this mounting environmental "knowledge" is the increasing array of information regarding nuclear arms and the nuclear industry. It is now generally admitted that any country - large or small - that acquires enough competence to build nuclear reactors will sooner or later also get a nuclear arms capability. The peaceful atom and the militant atom are Siamese twins.

Everybody knows that war is more destructive to the environment than anything else - even Australia would not escape if in the event of a nuclear war, all bombing activity was restricted to the Northern Hemisphere (see "Habitat" Vol.12 No.2 April 1984, "Australia and Nuclear Winter: On the Beach Revisited").

What to do? Panic, shrug our shoulders, bury our heads or perhaps build more shelters - perhaps not. Ignorance on our part is the greatest ally that the pro-nuclear lobby could hope for. As long as environmentalists know next to nothing about the "omnicide" that perhaps awaits us there will be no popular movement strong enough to avert the approaching catastrophe. Information abounds and only needs to be sought, but political courage and determination, as yet, lacks resolve. Hopefully the conservation movement will help formulate the direction our political leaders should take in order to avert our greatest environmental threat.

Editor

WHAT TO DO

Write to the P.M., Ross Free (Member for Macquarie) C/- Parliament House, Canberra, outlining your concerns and urging a strengthening of the A.L.P.'s anti-uranium policy at the Annual A.L.P. Conference in June.

If you need information, Total Environment Centre has some, cheap but excellent publications for sale. One, in particular by MAUM/FOE is \$6.95 and easy reading; "The Nuclear Environment", a Handbook on Nuclear Power for Schools and the Community.

Our Future is in Our Hands.

FUTURE EVENTSTalks

May 13th - Birdwood Gully, Springwood. Meet 10am outside 52 Boomerang Road, Springwood. This will be a simple nature stroll, bring lunch if you like.

June 10th - Wollongambe River from Mt. Wilson. Meet 11am at Mt. Wilson Fern Park for an early BBQ then a brisk walk down to the Wollongambe River. This is a beautiful river with pristine wilderness qualities, but how long will it remain this way? Turbid polluted run-off from sand mines, coal mines and forestry activities threatens to degrade these qualities.

Meetings

May 17th - at this gathering of our clan, we will be thrashing out policies on uranium mining and fire management in the Blue Mountains. The Society needs documented policies on these and other issues for public information and media release.

June 8th - A Public Forum on Fire Management in the Blue Mountains. Appropriate speakers are soon to be confirmed. Watch the Gazette for details.

July 13th - Beverley Fiedler will show some of her inspiring slides and talk on the Plants of Burrendong Arboretum.

Workshops

Attendance has fallen lately - members should make an effort to participate in these workshops, we need your guidance and help.

May 21st - 7.30pm at 52 Boomerang Road, Springwood.

June 18th - 7.30pm at 7 Kent Street, Glenbrook.

APRIL MEETING

Beatrice Palmer was our welcome guest and shared her extensive in-depth knowledge with us of the private lives of some Blue Mtns. Birds.

Of course, most of us have some sort of native shrubbery in our gardens which is bird-attracting but in doing this we inevitably lose some of these birds to predation by domestic and feral cats. Beatrice maintains that if domestic cats are fed on fresh meat, they lose their incentive to catch live prey. This could be "food - for - thought" for many of us.

Incidentally, for those of us who have a Lilly Pilly in fruit at the moment, the garden is certainly providing hours of enjoyment watching bird activity.

ON THE WONGA-VINE.....

I heard that a variety of Rust imported to control Blackberry is really making its mark on its way up from Victoria.

W.G.

GLENBROOK NATIVE PLANT RESERVE

If you are in need of healthy, strong native plants at very reasonable prices they can be purchased at the Reserve. It is open from 12 noon to 4 pm on Wednesdays, Saturdays and Sundays. It's that bit of bush with the fence around it opposite the Tourist Information Bay on the Highway at Glenbrook.

We should try to grow species local to the Blue Mtns at least; species from other states have the potential to have a negative ecological impact here in the same way as the Kookaburra is to W.A.

The Reserve epitomises the vast array of management problems for

most nature conservation reserves in Australia all crammed into 2.2ha. It is affected by almost every problem you can think of;

- weeds
- polluted run-off
- vandalism of buildings
- over-use by the public
- feral and domestic cats and dogs
- threat of fire
- lack of an informed management plan

BUT, the Reserve is fortunate in that every week, a dedicated, faithful group of workers turn up to toil with these problems. If this dozen or so are needed to manage and keep up with the problems of an area as tiny as this, what hope for our nature conservation reserves? Are they really large enough to protect and look after themselves?

The Government must realise that with every new nature conservation reserve, funds need to be provided for the provision of adequate staff to manage and preserve those qualities for which the land was reserved.

If a dozen people are having trouble keeping up with these problems on 2.2ha, how will our nature conservation reserves fair in the future for lack of adequate staffing?

A MEMBER REPORTS.....

That something akin to the call (screech...) of a Barking Owl has been heard at night in a gully near Springwood. Can Anyone confirm this?

BLUE MTNS ENVIRONMENT MANAGEMENT PLAN

Members - now is your chance to have a say in planning land-use in the Lower Blue Mountains around environmental guidelines. Our Society is conducting field work at selected undeveloped land from Lapstone to Linden. The information gathered will form the basis of our recommendations to Council when the E.M. Plan is placed on Public Exhibition. But we need workers; botanists, ornithologists, geologists, ecologists, the more the merrier! Just one day of one of your weekends in the next month would help us in our task.

IVY MARKET

The last time we asked for donations of pre-loved junk, the response was encouraging. You'd be surprised what people will buy; so give Aileen a call on 39-4079 if you want to get rid of books, clothes, crockery, toys, plants, VWs, spare blocks of land, odd homes or unused 747s and she will pick them up. The Ivy Market is our only regular fund-raising activity, your support is vital for that reason.

By the way, a faithful few helpers conduct this activity every month. They could do with some help.

PENRITH LAKES SCHEME

The Society has responded to the Regional Environmental Study which addressed the question of a water source for the Lakes. Details of our submission next issue.

URANIUM

A delegate from our Society attended a special Conference of the Nature Conservation Council in February. The Conference re-affirmed existing policy which condemned the mining and export of uranium and its consequences. The Conference went on to draw up a further statement on Uranium as follows:

THAT Out of concern for the effects of nuclear war and the nuclear fuel cycle on all life on earth, and indeed the earth itself,

the Nature Conservation Council:-

Opposes:

- a) the mining and export of uranium, thorium and other nuclear fuels;
- b) the development and use of power stations fueled by nuclear materials, uranium enrichment plants, or any other part of the nuclear fuel cycle;
- c) the manufacture, stockpile, deployment or use of nuclear weapons;
- d) the carriage of nuclear weapons and materials via Australian land, air space or territorial waters:

Supports:

- a) taking strong economic and diplomatic action in all available international forums to prevent the proliferation of nuclear weapons;
- b) the declaration of a nuclear-free Pacific and the exclusion of nuclear weapons from Australia;
- c) increasing efforts to conserve energy;
- d) the use of renewable energy alternatives to both nuclear and fossil fuels;
- e) the development of alternatives to the use of radioactive materials for physical, biological, biochemical and medical research, diagnosis and treatment:

Urges:

the Australian Government to adopt policies to achieve these aims.

This Policy and Statement are on the agenda for discussion at our May Meeting.

DAINTREE RAINFOREST WILDERNESS

Conservation of the wet tropical rainforests and in particular the Greater Daintree region has become a national priority for conservationists in 1984.

The Australian Heritage Commission is preparing a submission for World Heritage listing.

The proposed Greater Daintree National Park is approximately 350,000 hectares, predominantly State Forest and Timber Reserve. Much of the area is rainforest, and 90,000 hectares of it is virgin tropical rainforest - the largest tract of its kind in Australia.

The Greater Daintree region also contains most of the remaining lowland rainforest in Australia. Botanists believe the area to be one of the centres of evolution of flowering plants on the planet. Primitive plants found here occur nowhere else in the world.

The Qld. Govt. have declared several small National Parks in the area. The Cape Tribulation N.P. was announced after the 2nd World Wilderness Congress in Cairns in 1980.

However, the Park was gazetted leaving a road reserve between Cape Tribulation and Bloomfield. This stretch is the only coastal rainforest wilderness in the wet tropics. It is bordered by live fringing reef which are Marine National Park Category B. Conservationists are absolutely opposed to construction of a road through the Park.

Douglas Shire Council applied for Federal funds for the road construction in 1983 and were refused on environmental grounds. The Council obtained \$100,000 from the Qld Cabinet as a special project. Main Roads Dept funds have not been available.

Road construction commenced in December 1983, with no preliminary survey and did not follow the gazetted corridor. Destruction of the National Park outraged many people and the works were blockaded by conservationists. A national meeting of all major conservation groups resolved to give the issue national priority. A legal case against the Qld. Govt. and Douglas Shire Council is being prepared.

The 'Wet' has halted the Council's work on the road, possibly until May.

Lobbying of Federal Ministers is a priority and donations to The Wilderness Society will help the Society save the area from needless destruction. These can be sent to TWS, 362 Pitt Street, Sydney.

Footnote: The LBMCS has donated \$100 towards the campaign, but letters to appropriate politicians are equally if not more productive. Write to Barry Cohen, Minister for Home Affairs and Environment, Parliament House, Canberra expressing your concern and urging Federal involvement in the issue.

The following items are extracted from "Ecofile", a new publication from the Fed. Dept of Home Affairs and Environment, instigated by Barry Cohen.

Tasmanian Rangers and Tourists in the South West.

The Commonwealth Government has made funds available to Tasmania to help protect the World Heritage Area and to promote Tourist development in the South West Region. \$500,000 will be provided for essential management of the Area in the busy summer months when visitor pressures are likely to increase markedly. The P.M. offered Tasmania up to \$5million in the 83/85 period for tourist development projects in the South West Region.

Extensions to Kakadu National Park

Kakadu N.P. is being expanded to include almost all the South Alligator River catchment, a wetlands area of major international importance. Stage 2 of the Park was announced last November. The Aust. N.P. & W.S. is now preparing the way for adding 2 adjacent pastoral properties to the Park. In the next 6 years, an additional \$36million will be spent on providing infrastructure for park management and visitor facilities to enhance bushwalking, viewing of Aboriginal sites, wildlife observation and other activities.

An Environmental Survey of Australia

The 1982 A.L.P. Policy calls for CSIRO and other relevant agencies to work jointly with the States and Territories, to establish an Environmental Survey of Australia. Preliminary action has begun on achieving this survey.

Chemicals -the Hazardous Helpers.

The Australian theme for World Environment Day June 5 1984 is "Chemicals can be hazardous - take care. Major government agencies will prepare education and information material to mark June 5. The material should promote a better community understanding of the degree of hazard of particular chemicals, and seek to achieve public responsibility in the disposal of toxic wastes.

Note: In the next issue of our newsletter, a list of pesticides, their trade names and ecology rating will be included.

End of Extracts.

INTERNATIONAL PLANTS CAMPAIGN

On 22.3.84 the World Wildlife Fund launched this Campaign. The Campaign aims to increase community awareness of the need for conservation of our plant resources and in particular endangered plant species, and to raise funds for projects directed at the conservation of endangered plant species.

Over 200 species of Australian native plants are threatened with extinction, including 4 rare W.A. banksias which are exploited by the wildflower trade. One of the WWFs projects involves a study of the biology of these species to make recommendations on how they should be managed to ensure their survival.

Further information on the Campaign is available from Angela Neal on 02-29-7572.

THE KANGAROO CULLING DEBATE

A statement in a recent edition of Australian Natural History reads as follows:

"As a result of the emotional attention given to kangaroos... other Macropods and conservation issues are being ignored."

Is our sense of compassion for native wildlife misplaced? What of the plight of the following fauna of NSW listed as "endangered"? Slowly but surely they are being pushed into oblivion; already some species on this list have not been observed in NSW for many years but there is still hope that they may be rediscovered.

Mammals

Yellow-footed rock wallaby
Bridled nail-tailed wallaby
Mountain pigmy possum
Eastern Quoll
White-footed marsupial mouse

Reptiles

Broad-headed snake

Birds

Providence petrel
Gould's petrel
Flash-footed shearwater
Black-necked stork
Treckled duck
Osprey
Pacific baza
Red Goshawk
Grey falcon
Halleefowl
Black-breasted buttonquail
Plains-wanderer
Lord Howe Island Woodhen
Brolga
Australian Bustard
Bush thick-knee
Pied oystercatcher
Hooded plöver
Little tern
Eastern bristlebird
Black-eared miner

Wompoo fruit-dove
Squatter pidgeon
Long-billed corella
Pink cockatoo
Double-eyed fig parrot
Superb parrot
Ground parrot
Paradise parrot
Turquoise parrot
Scarlet-chested parrot
Eastern grass owl
Sooty owl
Marbled frogmouth
Albert's lyrebird
Rufous scrub-bird
Red-lored whistler
Striated grasswren
Grey grasswren
Black-throated finch
Lord Howe Island currawong
Black-winged currawong

If you add endangered species from other states' lists, then you have a long list indeed. If just some of the money and energy spent on the kangaroo culling debate was re-allocated to ensuring the preservation of those species listed above, then maybe it wouldn't be so long. But by the same token, a watchful eye should be kept on kangaroo numbers.

After all, the debate is only over 3 species of kangaroo and not one of them is on the endangered list!

WESTERN DIVISION CROPPING in NSW

The following letter was sent to Chris Pratten, Chairman of the Nature Conservation Council, after press coverage of the proposal to allow cropping entitlements in the Western Division. The author is a retired police officer who has served in several town-ships in the Western Division.

To: Western Lands Commissioner, Sydney

Sir,

You are quoted in the SMH of 24,2,84 as saying "modern farm machinery enable some western lands to be cropped in safety" and "the days of the

big dust storms from the west are over".

I am presently shuttered in a home in the township of Dareton which is shrouded in a big dust storm. The sky is obscured, the street is opaque, the sun is obscured. My windows are closed. It is one of those non-existent dust storms. Not from the Western Division admittedly but from the Victorian Millewa across the Murray. Croplands worked by the modern machinery you talk of. Mr. Commissioner it is not the machinery, ancient or modern, that blots out the sky it is the dirt denuded of trees and vegetation and denuded it is whether by a horse, plough or Allis Chalmers.

I am not a farmer. I am not a conservationist. I am just a citizen who lives in the Western Division. It is all right for you to make your ridiculous and dangerous statements from the calm of an air-conditioned office. I have had to turn my air-conditioning off - it sucks in a cloud of red dust.

We've had a hot northerly all day, bearing down on us from the sweating plains of the Western Division, but it brought not an ounce of dust. The wind is swinging round to the west and later the south and as it does a ton of Victorian dirt is dropping on me. What is your stupid plan meant to do, repay the Victorians with tons of Western Division, NSW dirt?

Now is not a drought, in fact heavy rains over Christmas and New Year brought a cloak of green over this area. In Victoria that vegetation has been destroyed by your modern machinery. In NSW the sheep have tickled it, and thrived on it and the country has benefitted.

Yours faithfully,
MR. J.N. Hobbs.

Editor's comment: Mr. Hobb's comments about the devastating impact of modern machinery are correct but on the other hand, the impact of sheep and cattle grazing does not provide for sustainable use of the land using many of the current management practices. The Western Division is a marginal zone and strong controls over all land-use practices must be applied whatever way you look at it.

FIRE AND THE AUSTRALIAN ABORIGINE - AN ENIGMA

Part 2.

by Phyllis H. Nicholson

If fire was maintained by the Aborigines it is also true that the Aborigines were maintained by fire for in many aspects of their life, fire played a significant part. The fire was an important focus of the social life of the family. Fire was essential to these naked people for warmth at night and early morning, for illumination and for protection against bad spirits. No one would venture into the dark without a firestick to drive away evil spirits.

In their many uses of fire, some motive for its use has been apparent at least to the European mind, but incidents have been recorded where this is not so obvious; for example, in their reports of confrontations with the Aborigines it is said by early settlers that the natives retired, setting fire to the bush as they went.

All the uses of fire are taken from observations by Europeans of what the Aborigines were actually seen doing with fire in their daily life. We have little knowledge of what was in their minds during the process or of what lessons were being passed on to the younger members of the family group. Aboriginal children have often been observed playing skilfully and unconcernedly with fire in a way that European children would not be permitted; European culture tends to emphasise the dangers of burning and the destructiveness of fire to its material possessions. It is from this cultural background that the early navigators and explorers mentioned the presence of great 'smokes' and numerous fires so frequently in their reports. Apparently they assumed that the number and volume of the smokes seen was a measure

of the amount of destruction being caused by the 'savages' who lived in this country.

Explorers and settlers freely and unrestrainedly reported the devastating efforts of the use of the firestick which every Aborigine appeared to carry. 'Every individual of the tribe when travelling or going to a distance from their encampment, carries a firestick for the purpose of kindling fires' (Nind 1831). Fire from his firestick was an essential tool to extract his food from his surroundings away from the camp. Women used it less skilfully to burn the base and so fell a dead tree for firewood before the modern axe became available, and they used small localised fires to flush out reptiles and small mammals from the undergrowth, to smoke out small animals from their hiding places in burrows or hollowed logs, or to clear small areas of litter so that they could dig for the edible underground part of food plants or for insect larvae.

Men used fire more extensively. In many regions where the vegetation was dense, paths were maintained by the use of a firestick to enable parties to move more freely from place to place. Hallam (1975) suggested that 'such tracks reflected constant movement and usage. Firing was both a deliberate part of such usage and an accidental consequence'. In hunting, fire reduced the effort to capture an animal by improving visibility in forest or tall grass, by causing the frightened animals to run into a prepared ambush or to come within reach of the hunter's spear or club. In the wake of the fire, women and children collected the smaller victims, insects, reptiles, birds and mammals, and in places so cleared, animal tracks became visible and could be followed profitably.

Part 3, next newsletter.

from "Fire and the Australian Biota"
Chapter 3.

Canberra: A.A.S 1981

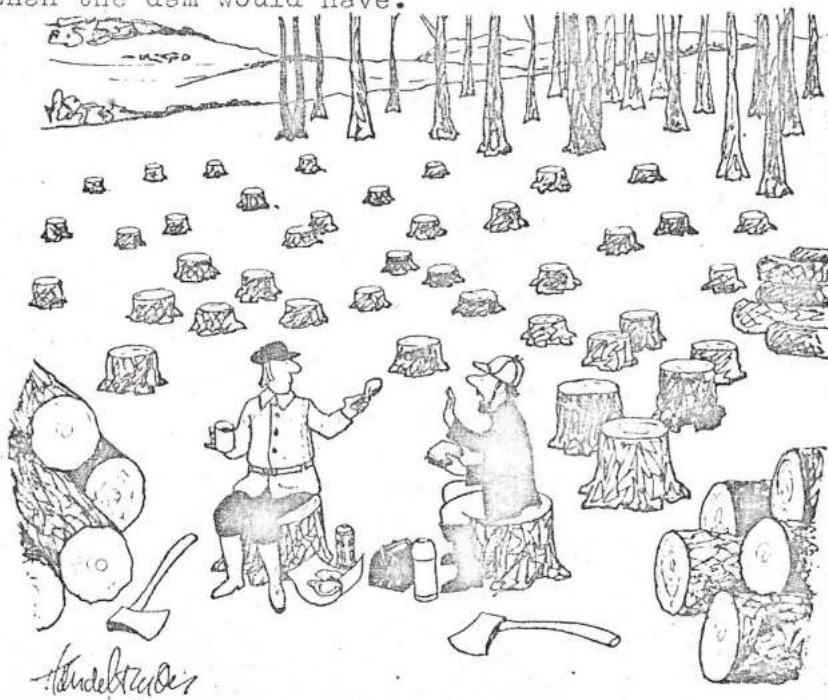
Editors: A.M. Gill, R.H. Groves,
and I.R. Noble.

JOBBS, NOT DAMS

from S.W.T.C. News, Mar/Apr 1984

WILSOC (Wilderness Society) OUTDOES HEC

A person with an obsessive personality in the Society (the editor) has put pencil to paper to come up with the startling conclusion that the Society is, or soon will be, employing 46 people on its various projects and its various offices. The HEC had planned to employ 29 people to run the Gordon-below-Franklin Dam, at an all-up cost of about a billion dollars. Because we employ many people at a pittance, we can engage 50% more people than the HEC for a miniscule fraction of the cost. Fancy that! The no-dams campaign has generated more jobs than the dam would have.



"No, thanks. I'm a vegetarian. I don't believe in killing animals."

The following letter is enclosed for members' perusal.

AUSTRALIAN TRUST FOR CONSERVATION VOLUNTEERS
PROVISIONAL N.S.W. DIVISION
399 PITT STREET, SYDNEY 2000

The Secretary

Dear Friend,

The Australian Trust for Conservation Volunteers, which has been operating in Victoria since 1981 will establish its N.S.W. Division at a public meeting in the Hallstrom Theatre of the Australian Museum on Tuesday 10th. April at 8.00 p.m. Entrance to the Theatre is via the vehicle entrance in William Street. We invite you to send a representative and to advise your members of the meeting and of our plans for the future.

A.T.C.V. aims to organise a large group of volunteers to assist landholders, both private and governmental, in labour intensive conservation tasks which are not commercially viable. Last year in Victoria, A.T.C.V. contributed over 1000 man days to tasks such as:

- Tree Planting, Weeding and Mulching
- Vermin Proof Fences
- Maintenance of Walking Trails
- Erosion Control
- Weed Control by the Bradley Method
- Maintenance of Heritage List Buildings
- Establishment and Repair of Wildlife Habitats.

Landholders include the National Parks Service, Fisheries and Wildlife Division, National Trust, Soil Conservation Service, Municipal Councils and private farmers.

Volunteers pay most of their transport costs and contribute to costs of food. The landholder arranges accommodation, usually in woolsheds, local halls or camping grounds and makes a small contribution per volunteer-day to A.T.C.V.

So far, most of our volunteers have been senior school students or members of youth groups. I believe that, in Sydney, there is a good number of adults who are prepared to do physical work, which benefits the environment, and for which governments will never find sufficient money. As an active member of a conservation society, I know the vital need for meetings, letter writing, deputations, etc. to increase public awareness of conservation matters. A.T.C.V. uses different methods, which may be more demanding but are certainly more rewarding.

A.T.C.V. will not become involved in public controversy. However, the executive does not necessarily accept all requests for assistance. If they have doubts about the conservation value of a proposal, they will seek informal discussions with the landholder and independent experts.

The other aspect of our 'conservation education' is the introduction of young people to the problems of maintenance of our natural resources in the most direct way. A.T.C.V. arranges 3 types of activity: 'National Task' - teams of 12 people for 6 working days, Week-end Residential Tasks, Non Residential 'Day Tasks'.

Your members are welcome to join as a group or as individuals. They can be part of the 'office team' or of the 'field teams' or of both. If elected to the initial committee, they will have the opportunity to help develop a new organisation because this division will be largely independent of the Ballarat H.Q. Anyone who has led a bushwalking party should be qualified to act as a Task Leader. We will be running Leader Training courses, usually in the evenings of National Tasks if the accommodation is suitable.

Our National President, Mr. Tim Cox, will be in Sydney during the week from 9th. April. If you have a meeting arranged for that week, and would like Mr. Cox to give a brief firsthand account of A.T.C.V. activities, please contact me on 451 4028 after hours.

Alex Tucker.