



# Upper Blue Mountains Conservation Society

(INCORPORATED)

Nature Conservation Saves for Tomorrow's People

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## BLUE MOUNTAINS WORLD HERITAGE NOMINATION LAND ACQUISITION OF THE GREAT SOUTHERN ESCARPMENT

### SYNOPSIS

The nomination of the Blue Mountains National Park Sandstone Complex for World Heritage Listing is appropriate from natural, cultural and land-use values. The area is extremely diverse geologically and climatically, and contains the greatest array of vegetation adapted to a nutrient-poor soil of anywhere in the world.

The Upper Blue Mountains contains a high concentration of rare and endemic plant species, several of which are affected by the effects of urban development. Many are potentially threatened by the continued, recently rapid population increase which has caused extensive clearing of native bushland.

The protection of bushland within the City limits is vital in order to demonstrate a sensitive land-use practice. Several large tracts of relatively untouched country immediately adjacent to the National Park and the urban settlements, are urgently in need of protection.

One of these forms the Southern Escarpment between Shipley Plateau and Peckmans Plateau. This proposal seeks a commitment by the Federal Government to purchase the private land and together with the present Council reserves, add it to the Blue Mountains National Park.

Funding is sought for

- (a) purchase of the land
- (b) provision of a Field Studies Centre
- (c) initial management costs
- (d) preparation of a joint management plan for the transport corridor/wildlife corridor.

### DESCRIPTION OF THE LAND

Acquisition of the land shown on the map edged blue is recommended as the first step in this proposal. In the long term it will be necessary to acquire the land edged green as well, in order to provide full protection of individual catchments, viewsapes and escarpments. The land constitutes the west/north-west continuation of the Great Southern Escarpment which starts at Kings Tableland and ends at Mt Sugarloaf near Mt Victoria. This escarpment forms an outstanding natural feature which provided the three explorers Blaxland, Lawson and Wentworth the means of traversing the Blue Mountains.

The Heritage status of the area is very closely linked to this escarpment since not only does it contain a complete geological record, the maximum plant diversity, but also the main cultural links with human effects on the environment.

The Southern Escarpment forms three ecological units

- (i) Jamison Valley
- (ii) Megalong
- (iii) Kanimbla.

Each is different, yet represents a gradation of vegetation and climate. The preservation of this gradation, a unique feature of the escarpment is a key feature of this proposal.

It is apparent that even small changes in height and horizontal distance, when combined with local cliff morphology and wind direction cause measurable differences in type of vegetation and microclimate.

Thus while climate changes along the length of the Southern Escarpment, it also changes across it.

The Megalong Unit of the escarpment is the one proposed for immediate acquisition. This unit is singularly as unique as the Jamison Valley area for the following reasons:

Climate. There is a wider variety of local climates than in the Jamison Valley.

- (a) Valley temperatures are hotter and dryer, winter valley frosts are more severe.
- (b) Cliff edges are subject to a greater range of extremes as they are not protected by any modifying cliff line such as Narrow Neck.

Topography. Microstructure of the cliffline is very complex which causes a mosaic of ledges and clefts with fewer massive cliffs than in the Jamison. The result is that there are many more protected sites where the climate is modified sufficiently to provide niches for rare plants.

One of these major cliff mosaics occurs in Nellies Glen-Bonnie Doon area and extends around to Megalong Head on Radiata Plateau.

Double-stepped cliffs are a feature of the northern part of Radiata Plateau together with escarpment "caps" or minor cliffs which are set back and above the major escarpments.

These all add complexity to drainage and climatic effects which is then reflected in the vegetation patterns.

Drainage. All creeks flow south-west into Megalong Creek and thence to the Coxs River. Several significant catchments contain potable water, however many very small catchments exist which are completely unaffected by development. This is due to the very fine mosaic of cliffines that produces these small catchments.

The eastern half of the escarpment is partly affected by highway/railway runoff and a small amount of development.

Vegetation. It is possible that this area has a wider array of undisturbed vegetation types than exists on the Jamison Escarpment. This is because of the low degree of development of the area but also due to the wider climatic regime.

The communities range from the dry grassy open forest of the Megalong sandy loams, through tall shrublands, warm temperate rainforest, extensive undercliff and waterfall fernlands, a variety of cliffedge heaths and plateau shrublands to the Eucalyptus oreades tall forests in sheltered upland gullies.

The area is characterised by numerous species of rare plants (Jones 1986). the following species in particular:

- (i) the westernmost stand of Microstrobos fitzgeraldii and the largest unpolluted stand
- (ii) Persoonia acerosa
- (iii) Acacia asparagoides - edge of its main distribution
- (iv) Phebalium lachnaeoides - the rarest plant in the Mountains
- (v) Rhizantella slateri - underground orchid, one of seven sites from which collected.

For these species this area constitutes a reference area, and a genetic resource. Many other rare species which are declining in the Katoomba-Wentworth Falls area because of urban expansion are present in this part of the escarpment.

Fauna. A wide diversity of species of vertebrates occurs in the area in accordance with the variety of native habitats in several different geologies and topographic units. The most notable occurrences include:

- (i) Lyrebirds on the top of the plateau
- (ii) Grey kangaroos on Radiata Plateau and environs, whereas they are elsewhere extinct in the vicinity of towns on the main ridge
- (iii) Yellow-throated scrubwren in rainforest
- (iv) Peregrine Falcon, a rare and endangered bird
- (v) the Silky Hairstreak Butterfly which possibly still occurs in Nellies Glen and is one of only two locations for the species.

The undeveloped nature of the area readily ensures an abundance of native fauna in contrast to all the developed areas of the Jamison escarpment.

This allows ease of observation of many species including the Lyrebirds mentioned above. Migrating birds too are frequently seen in flocks following the windflow up and over the cliffs in selected locations.

THREATS. The area is littered with failed attempts by man to economically develop the area. It has left its scars, derelict buildings and landscape damage. The most severe of these is the 1968 attempt to put a road down the beautiful Nellies Glen. The damage was never repaired, leaving a shameful legacy which this proposal seeks funding to repair.

A major weed invasion of the notorious broom occurs on the edge of the proposal in the "Springvale" property at Pulpit Hill. The regrading of tracks and roads could well aid the spread of this weed as it has in Barrington Tops National Park.

Radiata Plateau. The redisturbance of Radiata Plateau would result in the spread of broom and other weeds into what appears to be a stable equilibrium of Pine and natives. It is apparent that the better adapted Eucalyptus oreades is outcompeting the Pine in some areas of the Plateau.

Disturbance of this area by the proposed resort will cause more damage than that behind the Hydro which has occurred over 100 years.

The Transport Corridor. In many places railway and roadway coincide and parallel each other, creating a major habitat break over 100 metres wide. R.T.A. proposals for making the highway four lanes could further seriously degrade the escarpment by:

- (i) increasing this habitat break up to 200 metres
- (ii) disturbing short run catchments and allowing weed invasion.

NOTE: both roads and railways are notoriously broom and blackberry infested, spreading this into undisturbed native woodland. Erosion control measures are clearly inadequate as siltation downstream demonstrates. Furthermore, both authorities carry out spraying to control the weeds.

Explorers' Tree Motel Proposal. This is a redisturbance proposal for an old brickworks site that is returning to natural conditions. It is directly upstream from the unique Bonnie Doon Falls rare plant site of Microstobos fitzgeraldii.

The walking track constructed in this area was done after careful redesign and consideration for the effects on the rare plants. The fact that walkers are ephemeral users of the area was considered in favour of the track.

#### SUMMARY

The Megalong unit of the Great Southern Escarpment is a unique natural area with very high cultural values superimposed. Two sites within the escarpment are unique combinations of rare plants and outstanding topography - these are Bonnie Doon Valley and Radiata Plateau.

\*\* Bonnie Doon on the one hand is the only relatively unpolluted catchment of a large waterfall of the Southern Escarpment. ALL the tourist waterfalls are undrinkable, even unfit for bathing at times.

\*\* Radiata Plateau is the last remaining undeveloped peninsula-plateau and also contains a major clean water north flowing catchment. The only other similar ones on Peckmans Plateau are all polluted.

The Toposequence from Plateau Top to Valley footslope from Triassic rocks to Ordovician rocks is nowhere conserved in such completeness with major rainforest stands adjacent.

Preservation of the entire unit would achieve town identity and continuity of habitat into the Water Board areas and National Park to the east.

The proposal is an excellent opportunity to maximise the World Heritage Nomination and our contribution to Greenhouse control.

Whilst this proposal covers 16 square kilometres of land, some of this is in Council and other reserves. You are requested to consider funding to achieve full protection of Radiata Plateau and Bonnie Doon Valley including Nellies Glen.

THE GREAT SOUTHERN ESCARPMENT LANDSOFFER BY UPPER BLUE MOUNTAINS CONSERVATION SOCIETY (Inc.)

1. The Society wishes to publicly make an offer of its Land Preservation funds exclusively for the purchase of land under threat of development specifically on Radiata Plateau and in Bonnie Doon Catchment.
2. The Society invites any person or corporate sponsor to donate to this fund exclusively for this land acquisition.
3. The Society undertakes to assist in the development and maintenance of a Field Studies Centre and programmes, on a suitable already cleared, stable site.
4. The Society invites the Federal and State Governments to contribute funds for the acquisition of this land.
5. The Society requests that the Federal Government give an undertaking that this land will be protected from development and that it will take action to achieve this aim.
6. The Federal Government is asked to support the World Heritage Nomination of the Blue Mountains on the basis that this land, the Nattai and Newnes additions are dedicated as National Parks.

27 February 1990