

Mrs. Ballantyne

KATOOMBA & DISTRICT WILDLIFE CONSERVATION SOCIETY

Newsletter No.(9). June 1972



Sacred Kingfisher
JOIN THE GOLD LEAGUE OF BIRD LOVERS
OURS TO PROTECT
NATURSCHUTZ UNSERE VÖGELN
TOCCA A NOI PROTEGGERLI
KINAI SPONTIE AIBH MAZ

Patron: Mr. Allen A Strom,
Advisor in Conservation
Dept. of Education.

"A whole generation thinks of obscenity not in terms of linguistics but as poverty in the midst of affluence, social injustice, ecological destruction and war."

Mr. Justice Howard Zelling.

OUR SOCIETY

Daytime Meeting;

Mrs. Nancy Douglass will speak on "Conservation Begins at Home" or "Do I Really Need It" on Monday 19th June at 10.30 a.m. This will not be an "official" meeting, but as there are many members unable to attend the evening meetings, it will give them an opportunity to meet fellow members, hear of the Society's activities, and perhaps offer suggestions. Coffee and a biscuit will be supplied for morning tea, but if you can stay to lunch please bring your own sandwiches, and join the munching around the open fire.

Office Bearers:

Those elected for 1972-3 were listed in the Annual Report. We would like to welcome our new Committee members, Mr Jim Davies (who is also the District Commissioner of the Upper Blue Mountains area of the Boy Scouts Association), and Mr Don Booth who was elected Minute Secretary in place of Mrs E. Penney, who was unable to continue this year. The Committee is appreciative of the time Mrs. Penney devoted to doing the Minutes.

"The Hut" Party:

This was held on 17th April for members who do Hut-Duty, and thirty-three gathered for the occasion and were welcomed by Mr Fred Astle. Miss Isobel Bowden gave a short talk about the exhibits, and added a few helpful hints and suggestions to aid in the smooth running of The Hut. Mrs Annalei Wintzler then consulted the members regarding prices etc., and the Big moment came when Mr Astle was called on to cut the Delicious iced fruit cake (ad lib. mixture, to the initiated) presented by Bob Douglass. It was handed around by John Castledon & Mark Avery.

Opportunity Table

Members are asked to bring items they would like to donate or for which they have no further use, on meeting nights when there is to be no guest speaker. The donor is to write the suggested price on the article, and if it is not sold, to take it home as we, the Society has no facilities for storing.

Constitution;

The following clause has been added to item(3) of the Society's Constitution:-
There shall be no more than five Honorary Life Members at any one time.

- Working Bees:** The main work at present is clearing and improving the Nature Trail, but there are many other things to be done---cleaning, simple clerical work and weeding at the Hut.
On one rather wet Saturday in April, we had thirt-
een workers on the Nature Trail, including a number of Wentworth Falls Church of England Grammar School boys.
Working Bees are being held twice a month---usually on Mondays, but this can be altered to suit. In fact if anyone has a few hours to spare on any day please let Winsome Gregory know. ('phone W.Falls 401)
- Nature Trail:** Map & Notes are now on sale in the Hut for 10¢, and are selling well.
There is an Earth Day competition being run by the Daily Telegraph and the Bank of N.S.W. The Society has entered this, with the Nature Trail as its project.
Our visitors from the Hawkesbury District Conservat-
ion Society admired the Conservation Hut and they hope to find a headquarters for themselves. We enjoyed their visit very much, and being able to take them along the Nature Trail.
- Council Help:** It is good to report that the Blue Mountains City Council has had some work done on the tracks in the Wentworth Falls Reserve area. It was so depressing to see the deterioration of well made tracks going almost unchecked. One of our members in particular has spent long hours clearing drains and removing overhanging growth, so it is heartening to know the Council is tackling it. With over twenty miles to maintain in the Wentworth Falls---Valley of Waters section, many man-hours will be needed to bring the trails back into good order.
- New Roster :** Mr Fred Astle reports that the Hut foster has been altered slightly. Copies of the new roster have been sent to those involved, and there is also a copy on the wall in the Hut. The hut was manned all through the school holidays, and we are very grateful to members responsible, including two senior High School boys, Paul Guy and Colin Long. Mr JOE LUKACS is still at Lightning Ridge; we miss his help.
John and Elizabeth Buki are now living at Vineyard. We are looking forward hopefully to seeing them with us at one of our gatherings.
- Students Society:** One of our new members, Mr. Ray Manegre has helped the students of Katoomba High School organise a conservation society. This is very good news, and we wish them success and hope to be able to help them in some way.
- Library :** New Books recently added to the Library are hereunder.
"Sydney Side Scenery" by Griffith Taylor (New ed. 1970) This very informative book has been donated in memory of Mr Sidney Vellenga, a foundation member of our Society.
"Southern Walkabout"(Published 1969) continues the Servery Family's 'Nature Walkabout' and is, to quote this well-known author 'not the record of one journey but the record of many.'
"A Treasury of Wild Life" (1972) Edited by Dr. D.F. McMichael 'Selected from The Magazine of The Australian Museum with 235 illustrations, 35 in colour.
"Sydney Town 1846-1851

Meetings: On June 29th, Mr. J. Robertson of the Forestry Commission will talk about Eucalypts and answer any questions about control burning.

On July 27th, Mr Roland Breckwoldt will be guest-speaker. Theme he has chosen is "Developing an Environment Strategy" in which he will emphasise the changes that are taking place in society as they relate to conservation and the role of Conservation Societies. Members will be invited to discuss the issues raised afterwards.

The Society hopes to own its own projector and screen soon. Prices and models are being compared now.

Outings: In April the outing was to Ruined Castle, Katoomba, descending to the valley by the Golden Stairs from Narrow Neck and then ascending to the Ruined Castle from which extensive views were enjoyed. Wonderful! The track, all the way, is in excellent condition.

The May outing attracted a larger group and from Blackheath we followed Porter's Pass, Doing the round trip and returning to Blackheath Via Centennial Glen.

/Nora Dillon

Each outing has its special attraction and is thoroughly enjoyed by all who take part. N.D.

New Members: The Society welcomes Mrs. E. Galloway, of Blackheath Messrs J. Kain, P. Manegre; Mrs. P. Mills & R. Leibel of Katoomba, Mr E. Sibiriatoff, of Leura; Mrs. M. E. Avis, Miss C. Avis & Rev. & Mrs. E. Hunter of Wentworth Falls; Mrs. P. Geidans, of Lane Cove, Mr F. G. Stirling, of Pot's Point; Mrs. du Cross, of Ingleside; Mr E. A. Parkin of Balgowlah, & Mr & Mrs. J. Hartnett of Pymble

Membership, Newsletter, Combined

The annual subscription was raised to \$1.00 at the Annual General Meeting in March. This is to cover both membership and copies of the Newsletter. Where Newsletter is not required, subscription is 50¢. A non-member may have the Newsletter posted for 50¢ a year

The membership Secretary reports that the response this year has been very good. However, if your subscription is still outstanding please help by sending it along.

FINE FOR SHOOTING GANG GANGS

In the Katoomba Court on May 15, a Medlow Bath man was fined \$48.00 for shooting two Gang Gangs and discharging a firearm in a public place.

The man said he did not know the birds were protected. They were eating his apples. Police acted on a complaint made by two members of our Society.

A Highlight of First Year of Ecology Action *****

Contacts with Government. Ecology Action sent many hundreds of letters to politicians on a number of issues and similarly contacted local government groups. Gradually it is becoming clear which politicians are genuine in their concern about the environment and the organisation intends to ensure these men are fully briefed.

PREHISTORIC MAN ON THE BLUE MOUNTAINS

Last year, Mr W.Holland, a geomorphologist in the Department of Geography, University of Sydney, and myself, as an archaeologist, excavated five Aboriginal sites in representative parts of the Blue Mts., to see if any correlation between climatic and cultural change in the Blue Mts. could be found. I had previously published "An Archaeological Survey of the Blue Mountains" (Mankind, 1970, pp.295-301) and the present work also set out to extend this survey.

Without going into details of our methods, the location and types of sites, and the description of artifacts, the following conclusions may be of interest to your readers.

1. The most recent culture in the Blue Mts. was the Bondaian, an industry characterised by the making of finely backed, stone points and blades. In other parts of Australia this culture seems to have been superseded in the last thousand or so years by one making greater use of organic materials (wood, bone, shell) and a more simplified stone technology. However in the Blue Mts. it persisted at least till 500 years ago (from a C¹⁴ date derived from Lyre Bird Dell) and almost certainly until the coming of white man. The earliest date obtained for this industry was about 3360 years ago (Blackheath) and it reached its peak, in technique and probably population, about 1500 years ago.
2. Prior to the Bondaian culture there is evidence of a break in occupation right across the Blue Mts.(and in other mountain regions) somewhere between 6,000 and 4,000 years ago. Why, we do not know, but it was probably due to climate--- perhaps too wet and/or cold.
3. Before this there flourished a more primitive culture, called the Capertian, characterised by the trimming of the edge of stone flakes, often resulting in the production of small saw-toothed implements. The climate was drier, e.g. the main cave at Lyre Bird Dell (which was very wet before the provision of the present picnic amenities) was quite dry. Here we got a C¹⁴ date of 12,000 years for the lowest occupational level, making it the oldest known dwelling on the Blue Mts. Similar ^{dates} for this industry have been obtained at Blackheath, Hazelbrook, Springwood and further afield on the Great Divide and on the coast.
4. We have no certain evidence of human occupation prior to this. However some open sites (where stratigraphic digging and C¹⁴ dating is impossible) show artifacts which belong to neither the Bondaian nor Capertian periods, but are characteristic of the Heavy Tool Tradition known from various parts of Australia dating back to 30,000 years (and also found in Tasmania). Elements of this archaic industry have been found in the blue metal quarries along the Nepean, and one chopper was dated certainly to 26,700 years old.

Samples have been taken from the base of some swamps in the Upper Mountains showing that some of these have originated as much as 17,000 years ago e.g. at Leura Falls Creek. These samples show from their pollen content that the bush has changed very little since then. The Leura Falls Creek sample, dating back 17,000 years, contained much charcoal, evidence of a big fire, which, considering that it was at the height of the glacial period (when natural combustion was less likely), may in fact be the oldest human "artifact" for which we have a sure date in the Blue Mts.

Above article by the Rev. Dr. Eugene D. Stockton

"NO ROOM FOR DEFEATISTS"

by Society President. Wilson Alcorn

There is no room for defeatists in the conservation movement, now or in the future. More and more people are being drawn into the movement by such protests as the recent coal mining in the mountains issue, which resulted in action from no less a person than the Premier of N.S.W.

Others are realising that the much overworked phrase 'Quality of living' means nothing if there is nowhere to go in their \$5,000 car. A growing awareness also of the folly of allowing overseas companies to destroy priceless areas needed for relaxation of an ever-growing urban community, and the creation of a real tourist industry with its enormous job-creating and foreign exchange earning potential

We note from Ecology Action's Newsletter that volunteers are having difficulty keeping up a news-cutting service as papers are so full of conservation issues. One I notice states that the Commonwealth Government will require, with any major project submitted to it, a detailed statement on anticipated effect on the environment. Even one year ago this would not have happened.

The pen is mightier than the sword and I would urge all our members to write letters and get others to write. Write to N.S.W. Minister for Environment and ask him why there is no member of his State Pollution Commission recognised as a conservationist by Conservation bodies. Write to the Federal Minister for Environment and ask him to stop Queensland Destroying the last examples of Tropical Rain Forest: and write to the Minister for Aviation asking him to stop the Concorde monstrosity; and so on.

In the meantime make sure you are a member of your local Conservation Organisation and encourage others to do likewise.

Slug on Nature Trail

Last month during work on the Nature Trail a species of slug, Not previously recorded for this locality was found---a native species belonging to the genus *Cystapelta*, species uncertain. Records from New South Wales are from near this area, and from Barrington Tops and Kosciusko.

A small dark slug about one and a half inches long, it remains in the bush. Readers need not fear an invasion of their gardens.

* * * * * /Isobel Bowden

PROJECT TO STOP THE CONCORDE

At the April meeting it was resolved to support this. It was decided a letter should be written to the Minister for Civil Aviation, Senator Cotton, expressing the Society's concern. Members were also asked to write personally.

One hundred leaflets "The Concorde Crisis" have been purchased and are in The Hut, ready for distribution. Members are urged to read and think about this important issue of supersonic transport.

Apart from terrific noise and enormous fuel consumption, there is the unknown effect of burning fuel on the ozone-layer in the stratosphere where these 'planes fly. This protects the earth from excessive ultra-violet radiation and its existence is critical to life on earth as we know it.

Both Canada and Switzerland have banned the Concorde from their airspace.

AERIAL IGNITION QUESTIONED

The recent burning of thousands of acres of bush in the Blue Mountains by "aerial Ignition" has caused concern among many of our members.

The policy of control burning on a wide scale in the winter to reduce bushfire hazard in the summer has been adopted by all Government bodies and authorities. The recent burn was carried out by the N.S.W. Bushfire Council and the Blue Mountains Bushfire Prevention Association with support from the Blue Mountains City Council. Also involved were the National Parks and Wildlife Service, the Metropolitan Water Board and the Forestry Commission.

Opposed to this considerable "establishment" is the Katoomba and District Wildlife Conservation Society, which for years has expressed grave doubts of the wisdom of controlled burning in the Blue Mountains.

Mr Koperberg Explains

To discuss the recent burn The Blue Mountains Conservation Federation called a meeting at The Hut, Valley of Waters, on May 16, addressed by Mr P. Koperberg, Fire Control Officer for the Blue Mountains.

Mr Koperberg told the well attended meeting that the entire concept of aerial ignition is being questioned by all parties--not all, however to do away with it but to see how effective it is.

There were three reasons for controlled aerial burns: (*1) by far the most economical (2) Gave access to areas hard to get at to reduce "fuel" (3) Gave control of the extent of the heat of the burn.

Areas of 5 to 10 thousand acres were the minimum. Average block treated is 12 to 20 thousand acres. Fine, calm winter days were picked, the aim being to limit heat intensity between 200 and 500 British Thermal Units per second per foot, as compared to a wild fire - 10,000 to 15,000 British Thermal Units per second per foot.

This low heat would burn the litter and some of the underscrub, but would not damage the trees. Areas with a measured "fuel" Buildup (i.e. accumulation of combustible litter) of 7 to 13 tons per acre were chosen to burn.

Research Not Complete

Research on a fairly wide scale is now coming into its own and may take 10 years to complete. We cannot wait for this but proceed with caution, Mr Koperberg said.

In the Blue Mountains at Lawson the Forestry Commission was conducting research with 5 acre plots, which would be burnt at different intensities and periods over a 7 to 10 year period. There would be a control plot for each burnt plot for comparison.

Mr Ted Foster, secretary of the Blue Mountains Environment Preservation Society, also addressed the meeting in support of control burning. He attended one of the burns on May 2nd, inspected the area from close at hand and from an aircraft.

He said those in charge of the operation controlled and monitored it very well, kept a very close check, were in a position to send in bush fire brigades and put it out, or call off the whole operation. He said some species of plants were burnt in addition to ground "fuel", (3) 50% at most. There were many areas of unburnt bush.

There was need for research into such things as time from germination to seed setting for all species, soil temperatures during all burns, soil composition before and after burning. Mr Foster said.

There were many questions from the audience and several people spoke against the control burning policy.

burning Questioned continuedEffect on Mountains

in an article in the Mountain Gazette, October 13, Mr foster says the amount of "ground fuel" considered dangerous buildsup in bush every 5 or 6 years, and that burning at these intervals is not considered harmful to bushland.

Presumably, therefore, if the Establishment's policy is successful, after a period there would not be any burnable bush in the entire Blue Mountains left unburnt for more than 6 years.

This is the situation which our Society deplors. Our policy was expressed at a special Local Conference organised by the Society following the disastrous fires of 1968-69. The findings of this Conference were compiled into a document, which, on July 7, 1969, was sent to the Hon. Mr H.J. Bate, M.H.R., of the Commonwealth Government Members' Bushfire Relief Committee.

Some Local Thinking

The covering letter points out (1) members of our Society are active in local fire fighting and (2) they have studied the local problem as conservationists with an understanding of the topography and ecology of the Blue Mountains.

The Conference findings do not attempt to generalise, considering only the Blue Mountains. Geologically, the report says, these are a potential desert. "Over thousands of years there has been a gradual change from more lush types of vegetation associated with volcanic outflow, the remains of which still exist on some high points, to harsher types better able to exist on the weathered sandstone soils.

"The succession here over geological perions is from sub-tropical rain-forest to mixed forest, to wet sclerophyll, to dry sclerophyll, and to low scrub and grass.

"Changes which in natural circumstances might take scores of thousands of years are being alarmingly accelerated by the occurrence of fires, by the impoverishment of better timbered areas through logging and fuel-gathering, and by destruction of the swamps through draining and clearing along the watershed. All permanent water in this area is held in, and depends upon, vegetation; namely, on richer timbered areas with their associated heavy layer of under-scrub, and on the swamps which act as enormous sponges from which water can drain slowly away. Water is not held in the sandstone formations.

"Fires, which have been in many cases deliberately lit, have been allowed to run over the country with devastating results during the past 25 years.

"Only so long as the surely deteriorating vegetation can manage to exist in the face of these onslaughts will the Blue Mountains remain blue"

So, if the Establishment has its way and burns the whole area every 5-6 years, we will finish up with open, savannah forests, letting in the sun, drying up the shallow, sandy soil, ensuring bigger and better bushfires, or raging grass fires every dry year.

"FIRES START NEAR SETTLEMENTS"

Dealing with the experience of fires in the Blue Mountains, the report says: "The majority of wild-fires ~~in the~~ have been lit near settlements. They have not started in densely-clothed valleys; fires do not explode out of valleys unless they are first allowed to burn into them.

"All major fires in 1968-9 summer, as far as ~~evidence~~ evidence known to us goes, were man-lit, mainly to "prevent fires" but also from carelessness, and - in one case at least - by a fire-bug.

"The most damaging burns spread out of control because of the arid conditions existing near settlements."

The report concludes with 9 practical suggestions for fire control and 4 for fire education which are deserving of deepest study. We hope to have space to elaborate in the next issue.

Nature Conservation Council Decision

At the Annual Conference of the Nature Conservation Council of N.S.W. on October 16, 1971, our Society submitted a resolution which was combined with a much more comprehensive one from the Monaro Conservation Society, and carried by the Conference, calling for more research before fire bombing ("aerial ignition") was used.

We have since received a letter from Mr Allen Strom, Hon. Secretary of N.C.C., dated May 18, stating that the N.C.C. Conference resolution had been forwarded to both the Prime Minister and the State Premier.

No reply has yet been received from the Premier, Sir Robert Askin, but a copy of the reply from the Prime Minister, Rt.Hon.w.McMahon, was enclosed by Mr Strom. One point the Prime Minister makes is that the responsibility for aerial prescribed burning on State lands with State authorities. We therefore await Sir Robert's reply.

The Prime Minister's letter outlines a most impressive program of research, including a Station in Victoria with a staff of 14. Further, it states that the research has been going on since 1950. However, "because the interval between prescribed fires is 5-7 years, a minimum of 3 fires would be necessary to assess any trends in ecological succession or soil processes".

Emotions Are Aroused

A fair amount of emotion is expressed by protagonists on both sides of this argument. Unfortunately, somewhat more so by us "antis", who would perhaps be more convincing if we radiated scientific detachment.

However, it is difficult to be detached when you see the beautiful Wild Dog Mountains and the unique flora of Narrow Neck, miles from any human habitation, burnt off by the "aerial ignition" techniques of modern science which, to quote Mr. Koperberg, "give access to areas hard to get at to reduce fuel".

Protests to Water Board

Many members of our Society following the experience of our June monthly outing to Narrow Neck, have written strong letters of protest to the ~~Metropolitan~~ Metropolitan Water Sewerage and Drainage Board, which controls the area.

That thoughtful and dedicated conservationist, Fred ~~Askin~~ Astle provides us with a fitting quotation to conclude this article. In his letter to Hon. H.E.Bates, M.H.R. (mentioned above) Fred quotes T.H.Huxley, 'a scientist who searched for truth': "To draw conclusions from insufficient facts is not a mistake, it is a crime against future generations."

1/2 /..Graham Alcorn

EDITOR GRAHAM ALCORN. BOX 39. MEDLOW BATH N.S.W.

This version of the Newsletter was re-typed from the original by Phoebe Coster in September 2020 to enable search engines to 'see' the text. Minor changes have been made to correct typographical errors and to add clarity.

Katoomba & District Wildlife Conservation Society

Newsletter No. 9 1972

Patron: Mr Allen A Strom, Advisor in Conservation Dept. of Education.

“A whole generation thinks of obscenity not in terms of linguistics but as poverty in the midst of affluence, social injustice, ecological destruction and war.” Mr Justice Howard Zelling.

OUR SOCIETY

Daytime Meeting; Mrs Nancy Douglass will speak on “Conservation Begins at Home’ or “Do I Really Need It” on Monday 19th June at 10.30 am. This will not be an “official” meeting but as there are many members unable to attend the evening meetings, it will give them an opportunity to meet fellow members, hear of the Society’s activities, and perhaps offer suggestions. Coffee and a biscuit will be supplied for morning tea, but if you can stay to lunch please bring your own sandwiches, and join the munching around the open fire.

Office Bearers: These elected for 1972-3 were listed in the Annual Report. We would like to welcome our new Committee members, Mr Jim Davies (who is also the District Commissioner of the Upper Blue Mountains area of the Boy Scouts Association), and Mr Don Booth who was elected Minute Secretary in place of Mrs E Penney, who was unable to continue this year. The Committee is appreciative of the time Mrs Penney devoted to doing the Minutes.

“The Hut” Party: This was held on 17th April for members who do Hut-Duty, and thirty-three gathered for the occasion and were welcomed by Mr Fred Astle. Miss Isobel Bowden gave a short talk about the exhibits, and added a few helpful hints and suggestions to aid in the smooth running of The Hut. Mrs Annalei Wintler then consulted the members regarding prices etc., and the Big moment came when Mr Astle was called on to cut the Delicious iced fruit cake (ad lib mixture, to the initiated) presented by Bob Douglass. It was handed around by John Castledon and Mark Avery.

Opportunity Table: Members are asked to bring items they would like to donate or for which they have no further use, on meeting nights when there is to be no guest speaker. The donor is to write the suggested price on the article, and if it is not sold, to take it home as we, the Society has no facilities for storing.

Constitution: The following clause has been added to item (3) of the Society’s Constitution:- There shall be no more than five Honorary Life Members at any one time.

Working Bees: The main work at present is clearing and improving the Nature Trail, but there are many other things to be done---cleaning, simple clerical work and weeding at the Hut.

On one rather wet Saturday in April, we had thirteen workers on the Nature Trail, including a number of Wentworth Falls Church of England Grammar School boys.

Working Bees are being held twice a month—usually on Mondays, but this can be altered to suit. In fact if anyone has a few hours to spare on any day please let Winsome Gregory know. (Phone Wentworth Falls 401)

Nature Trail: Map and Notes are now on sale in the Hut for 10 cents, and are selling well. There is an Earth Day competition being run by the Daily Telegraph and the Bank of NSW. The Society has entered this, with the Nature Trail as its project.

Our visitors from the Hawkesbury District Conservation Society admired the Conservation Hut and they hope to find a headquarters for themselves. We enjoyed their visit very much, and being able to take them along the Nature Trail.

Council Help: It is good to report that the Blue Mountains City Council has had some work done on the tracks in the Wentworth Falls Reserve area. It was so depressing to see the deterioration of well made tracks going almost unchecked. One of our members in particular has spent long hours clearing drains and removing overhanging growth, so it is heartening to know the Council is tackling it. With over twenty miles to maintain in the Wentworth Falls-Valley of Waters section, many man-hours will be needed to bring the trails back into good order.

New Roster: Mr Fred Astle reports that the Hut roster has been altered slightly. Copies of the new roster have been sent to those involved, and there is also a copy on the wall in the Hut. The hut was manned all through the school holidays, and we are very grateful to members responsible, including two senior High School boys, Paul Guy and Colin Long. Mr Joe Lukacs is still at Lightning Ridge; we miss his help.

John and Elizabeth Buki are now living at Vineyard. We are looking forward hopefully to seeing them with us at one of our gatherings.

Student Society: One off our members, Mr Ray Manegre has helped the students of Katoomba High School organise a conservation society. This is very good news, and we wish them success and hope to be able to help them in some way.

Library: New books recently added to the Library are hereunder.

“Sydney-side Scenery” by Griffith Taylor (New ed. 1970) This very informative book has been donated in memory of Mr Sidney Vellenga, a foundation member of our Society.

“Southern Walkabout” (Published 1969) continues the Serventy Family’s “Nature Walkabout” and is, to quote this well-known author ‘not the record of one journey but the record of many.’

“A Treasury of Wild Life” (1972) Edited by Dr D F McMichael ‘ Selected from The Magazine of The Australian Museum with 235 illustrations, 35 in colour.

“Sydney Town 1846-1851.

Margaret Pinniger.

XXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXX

Meetings: On June 29th, Mr J Robertson of the Forestry Commission will talk about Eucalypts and answer any questions about control burning.

On July 27th, Mr Roland Breckwolft will be guest-speaker. Theme he has chosen is “Developing and Environment Strategy” in which he will emphasise the changes that are taking place in society as they relate to conservation and the role of Conservation Societies. Members will be invited to discuss the issues raised afterwards.

The Society hopes to own its own projector and screen soon. Prices and models are being compared now.

Outings: In April the outing was to Ruined Castle, Katoomba descending to the valley by the Golden Stairs from Narrow Neck and then ascending to the Ruined Castle from which extensive views were enjoyed. Wonderful! The track, all the way, is in excellent condition.

The May outing attracted a larger group and from Blackheath we followed Porter’s Pass, Doing the round trip and returning to Blackheath Via Centennial Glen.

Each outing has its own special attraction and is thoroughly enjoyed by all who take part.

Nora Dillon

New Members: The Society welcomes Mr F Galloway, of Blackheath Messrs Kain, P Manegre: Mrs P Mills and R Leibel of Katoomba, Mr ? ?, of Leura; Mrs M E Avis, Miss C Avis and ?? Hunter of Wentworth Falls; Mrs P Geidens, of Lane Cove, Mr F G Stirling, of Potts Point, Mrs ?? Cross, of Ingleside; Mr E A Parkin of Balgowlah, and Mr and Mrs J Hartnett of Pymble.

Membership, Newsletter, Combined

The annual subscription was raised to \$1.00 at the Annual General Meeting in March. This is to cover both membership and copies of the Newsletter. Where a newsletter is not required, subscription is 50 cents. A non-member may have the Newsletter posted for 50 cents a year.

The membership Secretary reports that the response this year has been very good. However. If your subscription is still outstanding please help by sending it along.

FINE FOR SHOOTING GANG GANGS

In the Katoomba Court on May 15, a Medlow Bath man was fined \$48.00 for shooting two Gang Gangs and discharging a firearm in a public place.

The man said he did not know the birds were protected. They were eating his apples. Police acted on a complaint made by two members of our Society.

A Highlight of First Year of Ecology Action

Contracts with Government. Ecology Action sent many hundreds of Letters to politicians on a number of issues and similarly contacted local governments groups. Gradually it is becoming clear which politicians are genuine in their concern about the environment and the organisation intends to ensure these men are fully briefed.

PREHISTORIC MAN ON THE BLUE MOUNTAINS

Last year, Mr W Holland, a geomorphologist in the Department of Geography, University of Sydney, and myself, as an archaeologist, excavated five Aboriginal sites in representative parts of the Blue Mountains to see if any correlation between climatic and cultural change in the Blue Mountains could be found. I have previously published "An Archaeological Survey of the Blue Mountains" (Mankind, 1970, pp.295-301) and the present work also set out to extend this survey.

Without going into details of our methods, the location and types of sites, and the description of artefacts, the following conclusions may be of interest to your readers.

1. The most recent culture in the Blue Mountains was the Bondaian, an industry characterised by the making of finely backed, stone points and blades. In other parts of Australia this culture seems to have been superseded in the last thousand or so years by one making greater use of organic materials (wood, bone, shell) and a more simplified stone technology. However in the Blue Mountains it persisted at least till 500 years ago (from a C14 date derived from Lyre Bird Dell) and almost certainly until the coming of white man. The earliest date obtained for this industry was about 3360 years ago (Blackheath) and it reached its peak, in technique and probably population, about 1500 years ago.
2. Prior to the Bondaian culture there is evidence of a break in ???? right across the Blue Mountains (and in the other mountain regions) somewhere between 6,000 and 4,000 years ago. Why, we do not know, but it was probably due to climate – perhaps too wet and/or cold.
3. Before this there flourished a more primitive culture, called the Capertian, characterised by the trimming of the edge of stone flakes, often resulting in the production of small saw-toothed implements. The climate was drier, eg the main cave at Lyre Bird Dell (which was very wet before the provision of the present picnic amenities) was quite dry. Here we got a C 14 date of 12,000 years for the lowest occupational level, making it the oldest known dwelling on the Blue Mountains. Similar dates for this industry have been obtained at Blackheath, Hazelbrook, Springwood and further afield on the Great Divide and on the coast.
4. We have no certain evidence of human occupation prior to this. However some open sites (where stratigraphic digging and C 14 dating is impossible) show artefacts which belong to neither the Bondaian nor Capertian periods, but are characteristic of the Heavy Tool Tradition ?? known from various parts of Australia dating back to 30,000 years (and also found in Tasmania). Elements of this archaic industry have been found in the blue metal quarries along the Nepean, and one chopper was dated certainly to 26,700 years old.

Samples have been taken from the base of some swamps in the Upper Mountains showing that some of these have originated as much as 17,000 years ago eg: at Leura Falls Creek. These samples show from their pollen content that the bush has changed very little since then. The Leura Falls Creek sample, dating back 17,000 years, contained much charcoal, evidence of a big fire, which, considering that it was at the height of the glacial period (when natural combustion was less likely), may in fact be the oldest human “artefact” for which we have a sure date in the Blue Mountains.

Above article by the Rev Dr Eugene D Stockton

“NO ROOM FOR DEFEATISTS” by Society President. Wilson Alcorn

There is no room for defeatists in the conservation movement, now or in the future. More and more people are being drawn into the movement by such protests as the recent coal mining in the mountains issue, which resulted in action from no less a person than the Premier of NSW.

Others are realising that the much overworked phrase ‘Quality of living’ means nothing if there is nowhere to go in their \$5,000 car. A growing awareness also of the folly of allowing overseas companies to destroy urban community, and the creation of a real tourist industry with its enormous job-creating and foreign exchange earning potential.

We note from Ecology Action’s Newsletter that volunteers are having difficulty keeping up a news-cutting service as papers are so full of conservation issues. One I notice states that the Commonwealth Government will require, with any major project submitted to it, a detailed statement on anticipated effect on the environment. Even one year ago this would not have happened.

The pen is mightier than the sword and I would urge all our members to write letters and get others to write. Write to NSW Minister for Environment and ask him why there is no member of his State Pollution Commission recognised as a conservationist by Conservation bodies. Write to the Federal Minister of Environment and ask him to stop Queensland Destroying the last examples of Tropical Rain Forest: and write to the Minister for Aviation asking him to stop the Concorde monstrosity; and so on.

In the meantime make sure you are a member of your local Conservation Organisation and encourage others to do likewise.

XXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXX

Slug on Nature Trail

Last month during work on the Nature Trail a species of slug, Not previously reordered for this locality was found, a native species belonging to the genus Cystapelta, species uncertain. Records from New South Wales are from near this area, and from Barrington Tops and Kosciusko.

A small dark slug about one and a half inches long, it remains in the bush. Readers need not fear an invasion of their gardens.

Isobel Bowden.

PROJECT TO STOP THE CONCORD

At the April meeting it was resolved to support this. It was decided a letter should be written to the Minister for Civil Aviation, Senator Cotton, expressing the Society's concern. Members were also asked to write personally.

One hundred leaflets "The Concorde Crisis" have been purchased and are in The Hut, ready for distribution. Members are urged to read and think about this important issue of supersonic transport.

Apart from terrific noise and enormous fuel consumption, there is the unknown effect of burning fuel on the ozone-layer in the stratosphere where these planes fly. This protects the earth from excessive ultra-violet radiation and its existence is critical to life on earth as we know it.

Both Canada and Switzerland have banned the Concorde from their airspace.

XXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXX

AERIAL IGNITION QUESTIONED

The recent burning of thousands of acres of bush in the Blue Mountains by "aerial ignition" has caused concern among many of our members.

The policy of control burning on a wide scale in the winter to reduce bushfire hazard in the summer has been adopted by all Government bodies and authorities. The recent burn was carried out by the NSW Bushfire Council and the Blue Mountains Bushfire Prevention Association with support from the Blue Mountains City Council. Also involved were the National Parks and Wildlife Service, the Metropolitan Water Board and the Forestry Commission.

Opposed to this considerable "establishment" is the Katoomba and District Wildlife Conservation Society, which for years has expressed grave doubts of the wisdom of controlled burning in the Blue Mountains.

Mr Koperberg Explains

To discuss the recent burn The Blue Mountains Conservation Federation called a meeting at The Hut, Valley of Waters, on May 16, addressed by Mr P Koperberg, Fire Control Officer for the Blue Mountains.

Mr Koperberg told the well attended meeting that the entire concept of aerial ignition is being questioned by all parties, not all, however to do away with it but to see how effective it is.

There were three reasons for controlled aerial burns: (1) by far the most economical (2) Gave access to areas hard to get at to reduce "fuel" (3) Gave control of the extent of the heat of the burn.

Areas of 5 to 10 thousand acres were the minimum. Average block treated is 23 to 20 thousand acres. Fine, calm winter days were picked, the aim being to limit heat intensity between 200 to 500 British Thermal Units per second per foot, as compared to a wild fire – 10,000 to 15,000 British Thermal Units per second per foot.

This low heat would burn the litter and some of the underscrub, but would not damage the trees. Areas with a measured "fuel" Build up (i.e. accumulation of combustible litter) of 7 to 13 tons per acre were chosen to burn.

Research Not Complete

Research on a fairly wide scale is now coming into its own and may take 10 years to complete. We cannot wait for this but proceed with caution, Mr Koperberg said.

In the Blue Mountains at Lawson the Forestry Commission was conducting research with 5 acre plots, which would be burnt at different intensities and periods over a 7 to 10 year period. There would be a control plot for each burnt plot for comparison.

Mr Ted Foster, secretary of the Blue Mountains Environment Preservation Society, also addressed the meeting in support of control burning. He attended one of the burns on May 2nd, inspected the area from close at hand and from an aircraft.

He said those in charge of the operation controlled and monitored it very well, kept a very close check, were in a position to send in bush fire brigades and put it out, or call off the whole operation. He said some species of plants were burnt in addition to ground "fuel" 50% at most. There were many areas of unburnt bush.

There was need for research into such things as time from germination to seed setting for all species, soil temperatures during all burns, soil composition before and after burning. Mr Foster said.

There were many questions from the audience and several people spoke against the control burning policy.

Effect on Mountains

In an article in the Mountains Gazette, October 13, Mr Foster says the amount of "ground fuel" considered dangerous builds up in bush every 5 or 6 years, and that burning at these intervals is not considered harmful to bushland.

Presumably, therefore, if the Establishment's policy is successful, after a period there would not be any burnable bush in the entire Blue Mountains left unburnt for more than 6 years.

This is the situation which our Society deplors. Our policy was expressed at a special Local Conference organised by the Society following the disastrous fires of 1968-69. The findings of this Conference were compiled into a document, which, on July 7 1969, was sent to the Hon. Mr H J Bate, MHR, of the Commonwealth Government Members Bushfire Relief Committee.

Some Local Thinking

The covering letter points out (1) members of our Society are active in local fire fighting and (2) they have studied the local problem as conservationists with an understanding of the topography and ecology of the Blue Mountains.

The Conference findings do not attempt to generalise, considering only the Blue Mountains. Geologically, the report says, these are a potential desert. "Over thousands of years there has been a gradual change from more lush types of vegetation associated with volcanic outflow, the remains of which still exist on some high points, to harsher types better able to exist on the weathered sandstone soils.

"The succession here over geological periods is from sub-tropical rain-forest to mixed forest, to wet sclerophyll, to dry sclerophyll, and to low scrub and grass".

Changes which in natural circumstances might take scores of thousands of years are being alarmingly accelerated by the occurrence of fires, by the impoverishment of better timbered areas through logging and fuel-gathering, and by the destruction of the swamps through draining and clearing along the watershed. All permanent water in this area is held in, and depends upon, vegetation; namely, on richer timbered areas with their associated heavy layer of under-scrub, and on the swamps which act as enormous sponges from which water can drain slowly away. Water is not held in the sandstone formations.

"Fires, which have been in many cases deliberately lit, have been allowed to run over the country with devastating results during the past 25 years".

"Only so long as the surely deteriorating vegetation can manage to exist in the face of these onslaughts will the Blue Mountains remain blue".

So, if the Establishment has its way and burns the whole area every 5-6 years, we will finish up with open, savannah forests, letting in the sun, drying up the shallow, sandy soil, ensuring bigger and better bushfires, or raging grass fires every dry year.

"FIRES START NEAR SETTLEMENTS"

Dealing with the experience of fires in the Blue Mountains, the report says: "The majority of wild-fires have been lit near settlements. They have not started in densely-clothed valleys; fires do not explode out of valleys unless they are first allowed to burn into them.

"All major fires in 1968-69 summer, as far as evidence known to us goes, were man-lit, mainly to "prevent fires" but also from carelessness, and – in one case at least – by a fire-bug.

"The most damaging burns spread out of control because of the arid conditions existing near settlements."

The report concludes with 9 practical suggestions for fire control and 4 for fire education which are deserving of deepest study. We hope to have space to elaborate in the next issue.

Nature Conservation Council Decision

At the Annual Conference of the Nature Conservation Council of NSW on October 16 1971, our Society submitted a resolution which was combined with a much more comprehensive one from the Monaro Conservation Society, and carried by the Conference, calling for more research before fire bombing (aerial ignition) was used.

We have since received a letter from Mr Allen Strom, Hon. Secretary of NCC, dated May 18, stating that the NCC Conference resolution had been forwarded to both the Prime Minister and the State Premier.

No reply has yet been received from the Premier, Sir Robert Askin, but a copy of the reply from the Prime Minister Right Honorable W McMahon, was enclosed by Mr Strom. One point the Prime Minister makes is that the responsibility for aerial prescribed burning on State lands with State authorities. We therefore await Sir Robert's reply.

The Prime Minister's letter outlines a most impressive program of research including a Station in Victoria with a staff of 14. Further, it states that the research has been going on since 195? However, "because the interval between prescribed fires is 5-7 years, a minimum of 3 fires should be necessary to assess any trends in ecological succession or soil processes"

Emotions are Aroused

A fair amount of emotion is expressed by protagonists on both sides of this argument. Unfortunately, somewhat more so by us "antis", who would perhaps be more convincing if we radiated scientific detachment.

However, it is difficult to be detached when you see the beautiful Wild Dog Mountains and the unique flora of Narrow Neck, miles from any human habitation, burnt off by the "aerial ignition" techniques of modern science which, to quote Mr Koperberg, "give access to areas hard to get at to reduce fuel".

Protests to Water Board

Many members of our Society following the experience of our June monthly outing to Narrow Neck. Have written strong letters of protest to the Metropolitan Water Sewerage and Drainage Board, which controls the area.

That thoughtful and dedicated conservationist, Fred Astle provides us with a fitting quotation to conclude this article. In his letter to Hon. H E Bates, MHR (mentioned above) Fred quotes TH Huxley, 'a scientist who searched for truth': "To draw conclusions from insufficient facts is not a mistake, it is a crime against future generations."

Graham Alcorn

EDITOR GRAHAM ALCORN BOX 39 MEDLOW BATH NSW