



# A History of Wilsons Promontory

by J. Ros. Garnet

WITH ADDITIONAL CHAPTERS BY TERRY SYNAN AND DANIEL CATRICE



Published by the Victorian National Parks Association



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## **A History of Wilsons Promontory National Park, Victoria, Australia**

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- An Account of the History and Natural History of Wilsons Promontory National Park, by J. Ros. Garnet AM.
- Wilsons Promontory – the war years 1939-1945, by Terry Synan.
- Wilsons Promontory National Park after 1945 [to 1998], by Daniel Catrice.

Cover design and book layout by John Sampson. Special thanks to Jeanette Hodgson of Historic Places, Department of Sustainability and Environment, Victoria for obtaining the photos used in this book.

On the cover the main photo is of Promontory visitors at Darby River bridge, c.1925. The bottom left picture shows visitors at the Darby Chalet, c.1925. To the right of that photo is a shot of field naturalist Mr Audas inspecting a grass-tree, c. 1912, and the bottom right photo is of a car stuck in sand near Darby Chalet, c.1928.

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Wilsons Promontory National Park today. Map courtesy Parks Victoria.

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# Foreword by Victorian National Parks Association

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John Roslyn Garnet (1906–1998), known as Ros., was a scientist who had a distinguished career with the Commonwealth Serum Laboratories. Through his connection with the Field Naturalists Club of Victoria, he was one of the founders of the Victorian National Parks Association (VNPA) and its honorary secretary for 21 years from its establishment in 1952. In 1982 he was awarded an Order of Australia (AM) for services to conservation.



Ros Garnet c. 1970.

He had a particular interest in the flora, fauna and human history of Wilsons Promontory National Park, one of Victoria's most loved natural icons and the southernmost part of the Australian mainland. Over several decades he researched the history of 'the Prom' (as it is affectionately known to Victorians) and wrote the text for a book on the subject which he completed in the early 1980s and hoped to publish. This did not eventuate, but the text has now been placed on the web as a useful reference for anyone researching the fascinating history of Wilsons Promontory and as a tribute to Ros.

In addition to Ros's text, there is a history of Wilsons Promontory during the Second World War (1939-45) by teacher and historian Terry Synan, and an account by Daniel Catrice, formerly Historian with the Victorian Department of Sustainability and Environment, of the Prom's history from 1945 to 1998. The latter year was the centenary of the park's establishment.

Ros. Garnet's text is reproduced in its original form with minor corrections of typing and grammatical errors but no revisions. Ros. did not record all the sources of his history and so it cannot be easily checked. However, it contains much interesting and valuable information not readily available elsewhere.

It should be noted that Ros. included a chapter on the Aboriginal history of the Promontory but added

a later hand-written note that the chapter should be revised. He was unable to carry out this revision, and as the existing text would need considerable updating it has been omitted.

We hope to add a revised chapter on Aboriginal history at a later date and wish to acknowledge the traditional owners of the Promontory (which was known to Indigenous people as Yiruk or Wamoom), the importance of its many thousands of years of Aboriginal history, and the ongoing involvement of local Aboriginal communities with the national park.

Chapters on the geology and flora of the Prom have also been omitted. The geology story has been partly superseded by later research, and the flora material is included in Ros's book *The Wildflowers of Wilsons Promontory*.

The VNPA gratefully acknowledges the work of Leon Costermans, who transcribed Ros. Garnet's original typewritten text into digital text, and of Gwenyth Vivien, who carried out some preliminary editing and correcting of the text.

We encourage readers who would like to help look after Wilsons Promontory National Park to contact the Friends of the Prom, who carry out regular surveys and working bees in the park. See [www.friendsoftheprom.org.au](http://www.friendsoftheprom.org.au) or phone (03) 9752 3846. More information about the Prom can be found on Parks Victoria's website [www.parkweb.vic.gov.au](http://www.parkweb.vic.gov.au).

Please note that the VNPA does not accept any responsibility or liability for omissions or errors of fact or interpretation in the attached documents on the history of Wilsons Promontory. Copyright in Ros. Garnet's History rests with the VNPA; copyright of the documents by Terry Synan and Daniel Catrice rests with the respective authors.

For more information please see our website, [www.vnpa.org.au](http://www.vnpa.org.au), or contact us on (03) 9347 5188, email [vnpa@vnpa.org.au](mailto:vnpa@vnpa.org.au).

Matt Ruchel  
Executive Director VNPA  
April 2009

# Acknowledgements, Preface, Introduction by J. Ros. Garnet

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*This book is dedicated to my wife and to all those who love their native land enough to want its wildlife always to have a place in it.*

— J. Ros. Garnet

## Acknowledgements

The compilation of a book of this kind would not have been possible without the help of hosts of people, both living and dead, but it is the living who deserve particular acknowledgement for the help they have given me during the years I have been occupied in preparing it.

I have never ceased to marvel at the amiability and courtesy of my informants and at the endurance of friends who have allowed themselves to be put to vast trouble in verifying facts and correcting errors which arise from ignorance or doubt.

In naming them individually and collectively I wish it to be recognised that whatever errors have persisted are due not to them but to me. Such people and institutions include the late Mr W Baragwanath, OBE, former Director of Mines; Mr Alex Burns, formerly Assistant Director and Curator of Insects at the National Museum of Victoria; Mr Fred Cripps of Toora; Mr Jock Greenaway of Hedley; the late Mrs Susan Greenaway of Hedley; Mr A C Hellison of Fish Creek, formerly District Land Officer in charge of the Yanakie Run; Mr J S Henthorn, leader of the MCEGS expedition to Refuge Cove in 1960-61; Mr J Lester of Shallow Inlet; Mr David Morgan of Melbourne; Mr Douglas Robertson of Reservoir; Mr Charles Rossiter of Hedley; Mr Alex. Selby of Gunbower Estate; Mr Harold Tarr of Melbourne; the Committee of Management of Wilsons Promontory National Park and especially its former Secretary, Mr E Kennedy and its members Mr J G Jones of Foster, a former Councillor of the Shire of South Gippsland and Mr W J Northey, a former officer of the Lands Department; the Fisheries and Wildlife Department, Melbourne; the Field Naturalists' Club of Victoria; the Department of Land and Survey and the Central Plans Office of that Department, especially Mr R Spreadborough; members of the McCoy Society; the Melbourne Walking Club; the National Herbarium, Melbourne, especially Mr James Willis, Assistant Government Botanist; the National Museum of Victoria, and Mrs Hope Black, formerly Curator of Molluscs; the National Parks Authority and, of course, the Victorian State Library.

One no less deserving of credit is my wife, who has displayed admirable forbearance amidst what often must have seemed, to one of her tidy disposition, a litter of papers, books, maps and files in unlikely places around the house, who has listened uncomplainingly to the interminable clatter of the typewriter, who has

shared my many excursions to South Gippsland and the Promontory, and who has, I hope, long since forgiven me for getting bogged in a morass (which has since been made negotiable by vehicle) at Chinaman's Creek and, the very next day, in sand near the shore of Corner Basin.

## Preface

My interest in Wilsons Promontory was first aroused by an uncle and aunt who had spent several months in the national park. My uncle, during the First World War, had been gassed—by chlorine or phosgene I suppose—and, in the belief that active life in the open air would help to repair the damage, he became one of the Park rangers in the spring of 1919. With his sister he was installed at a cottage at Barrys Hill.

Although their stay on the Prom was all too short, it left happy memories which were reflected in the tales they told of their delight at being able to dwell in such surroundings—where lovable creatures were free to live as nature ordained, where wildflowers flourished in almost mad confusion, unrestrained by at least some of the hazards which beset them elsewhere.

Place names such as Barrys Creek, Bennison, Corner Inlet, the Darby and Mount Vereker and personalities such as Bill Cripps, Professor Ewart, Jimmy Kershaw and Baldwin Spencer began to mean something to an impressionable youth who had been born in Gippsland and remembered enough of the wonder of the bush and the mighty forests of the Strzelecki Ranges to be able to form some kind of mental picture of the place about which they spoke.

Later on, in my student days, I determined to see the Promontory for myself so, during the summer vacation of 1924, I set out on my bicycle on my first grand tour. Rather inadequately equipped with a light canvas sleeping bag, a rug and a collection of food, clothes and anything else likely to be of use that could be crammed into a shoulder pack, I set off. Among the inadequacies was money which, in those days, was for me in short supply.

Bitumen roads were uncommon in the 1920s but, by way of compensation, so were motor cars. Indeed, after passing Leongatha, I had the dusty and bumpy road to myself. Cycling along that road in the heat of a summer day is something which only the youthful and carefree could really enjoy. The exhilaration of spinning quietly along the bush roads and tracks, breathing the scent of eucalypts and other aromatic trees and shrubs, listening to the murmur of insects on the wing, the drumming of cicadas and the calls of birds is something which will linger much longer in my memory than the discomfort of heat, dust and flies.



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The ride had its retrospectively comic moments. Having breasted a rise somewhere between Buffalo and Boys I have a clear recollection of 'free-wheeling' down the hill and bringing the bike to a sudden stop because a big black snake was crossing the road. I jumped off, seized the nearest stick I could see in the hurry of the moment and lunged at the reptile. In my anxiety to kill the poor beast before it could glide on its peaceful way into the ferns by the roadside I fell flat on my face beside the departing snake. Doubtless it was more concerned for its own safety than about me. It kept gliding until it vanished from view. I have since learned to be rather more careful in approaching snakes and I no longer have the urge to kill them merely because they happen to be in sight.

In the late afternoon I reached Winchester's cottage at Shallow Inlet. The place was lively with both dogs and fleas but the brothers were hospitality itself. They were out fishing when I arrived so I spent some time watching what must have been thousands of black swans feeding in the shallows of the Inlet. It was an unforgettable sight to see such flocks of these graceful birds silhouetted against the gently lapping waves—coloured by shafts of gold and crimson from the rays of the setting sun.

Early next morning I dragged the bike across the Hummocks on to the hard beach and set off for the Darby River along a track I have never again had to travel. On the occasions of my next visit there was a sandy bridle path through the heathlands of the Yanakie Isthmus. It joined the old track where it emerged from Cotters Lake which it crossed or skirted according to the season—whether it held water or didn't. Being summer time the 'lake' was, on this occasion, dry and criss-crossed with paths formed by the cattle that grazed on this part of the old Yanakie Run. From here half an hour's hard pedalling through the dune sand brought me to the river where I camped among the dense tea tree scrub which then existed along the north bank. I soon made myself known to the ranger, Viv. Weston, whose help and good advice made my visit much more profitable than otherwise it might have been. I soon learned that a bicycle was of limited use in exploring the tracks and bridle paths that then existed in the National Park. A trip into Lilly Pilly Gully demonstrated its limitations. Thereafter my journeys were on foot—to Tongue Point, Sealers Cove, the Vereker Landing, to the top of Vereker itself and to Barrys Creek where I stayed overnight in the then vacant cottage that had been the headquarters of my uncle and aunt. Weston had given me the key to the cottage and, rather unnecessarily, a heavy waxed-canvas groundsheet which I lugged the twenty-eight miles there and back in the heat of summer. I didn't realise how superfluous it was until I reached the cottage which was adequately

supplied with beds and blankets. However, I expect Viv considered that my thin canvas sleeping bag would be of little use should a storm blow up and I had to camp out along the track.

The 'Prom' was all that I had imagined. Animals large and small—koalas, wallabies, echidnas, lizards, emus and birds of lesser stature were plentiful. Most of the wildflowers (which I then knew little about anyway) had withered with the advancing summer but the fern gullies were as green and refreshing as ever, reminding me of the shady glens along the creek that ran through the farm where I had spent my first nine years—a fern gully now quite obliterated by the march of progress and in which dwelt lyrebirds, satin bower birds, platypus and wombat.

This one week of solitary rambling in the National Park was an experience never to be forgotten. It whetted my appetite for more. I have been back—with long intervals between visits—and, on each occasion, have noted the changes that have taken place over the years. Some of them have not been always to the advantage or benefit of the Park and its visitors.

Since that first solo excursion in 1924, I have pushed a bicycle from one end of Victoria to the other, walked to places where a bike could not carry me and, in more recent years, travelled the easy way and in better company to the lesser known scenic places in Victoria and to places beyond its borders but I have yet to find a spot with quite the same appeal as Wilsons Promontory National Park. It is the place that taught me to understand the real purpose of those who, for so long, fought to have it dedicated as a National Park. Yes, they were idealists. But without such men to provoke the vision of a retreat for those who hunger for the mental refreshment, relaxation and inspiration which it can provide we would be a sorry crowd indeed. As I came to know the Promontory better I began to understand that, popular as it now is, it needed interpreting to as many as would care to listen. As a nature reserve it has suffered sadly at the hands of its owners—mostly from well meant intentions but not inconsiderably from outright exploiters of its natural assets. But what place of any scenic merit has not?

How best could it be interpreted? Who would be the interpreter? This book is the answer to those questions but whether it answers them adequately is quite another matter. I can only hope that it will help to do so. To me the history of an object is, often enough, much more interesting than the object itself. The object is valued not so much for its intrinsic worth but for the associations which attach to it; and, so it is with the 'Prom'. To know something of its origin and evolution is to be better equipped to interpret it sympathetically. Having served my time as a professional scientist and

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being, by inclination (among other things), a field naturalist, I have used the opportunity the compilation of this book has offered me of including as much information as I could glean about the natural history of the place. The result has been that the original idea of a small handbook of the kind that Professor Ewart had in mind in 1912 has outgrown itself. I found it quite impossible to deal briefly with the chronological and natural history of this national park. There was too much to tell and too much to talk about but I hope that, in the telling, I will have managed to transmit to the reader some of the interest and enthusiasm for this and every other of our great nature conservation reserves which has held me enthralled for more than two thirds of a lifetime. I have long since learned that no nature conservation reserve needs 'developing'. They all need expert management and that sort of management requires that they be maintained in as natural a state as is humanly possible for them to be kept. Catering for an unrestricted flow of visitors is not a sign of good management although it may well be profitable for those few who may engage in the catering. When one expresses such an opinion there is almost always a prompt reaction from the thoughtless or self-interested. The catch phrase of such people is 'locking up'. Naturalists want to 'lock up' the national parks. They want to keep out all but themselves. How silly!

Not long after the establishment of the National Parks Authority in 1956 one of its members who spoke as an agriculturalist was reported as having claimed that he was not interested in nature protection and that if he thought Wilsons Promontory was to be closed or diminished in area he would rather see the place turned over to agriculture than have its vast acres locked away from the public. It was one of the misfortunes of the Authority that men of such a turn of mind should have felt obliged to remain a member of a team whose first duty, according to the National Parks Act, is 'to maintain every national park in its natural condition and to conserve therein ecological associations and species of plants and animals and protect the special features of the parks'.

If this object is to be met, entry into any nature reserve ought to be restricted, naturalists being 'locked out' along with the rest. In passing, it might be noted that it is not possible to distinguish a naturalist from other kinds of people—by inspections at any rate.

National Parks are not for loungers. They are not designed for the socialite. Such folk would be far happier in places more suited to their needs. The tendency to cater for them is not due to any special solicitude for them but rather for the money they can drop into the waiting hands of the developers. Happily the philosophy governing the management of our national parks now recognises that expensive hotels are

not a necessity in a nature conservation reserve; nor are sports grounds of any kind.

You, my reader, will have noted that I do not favour the kind of developments that have been urged from time to time for such national parks as Wilsons Promontory and Mount Buffalo. I enjoy liquor as much as anyone else but I have never found it essential to my enjoyment of a holiday in the parks. I like deep-piled carpets and other manifestations of gracious living as much as the next man but I can still enjoy a holiday away from such amenities, and there are hundreds of thousands of people of like mind. There is not room for all of us at any one time, so why let the place be destroyed in order to please the few who cannot bear to do without these things? By discouraging them one is doing a good turn to the less pretentious folk who want to use the parks in a legitimate way.

Those who thrive on mountaineering have, on the Promontory, all the climbing they could wish for. Those who exhaust their wonderment on scenery have ample scope there. The park is made for the photographer, for the artist and for the outdoor man and woman. One does not have to be an athlete or a spartan to enjoy what it has to offer. I have been lame since the polio epidemic of 1918 but the ensuing disability has not greatly hindered me from exploring its high mountains and its many other scenic places. The light disability might even have been an advantage. Perhaps my slower rate of travel gave me more time to see what was to be seen. This, coupled with an infinite curiosity to know about the world around me, will surely explain the genesis of my enthusiasm for national parks and for all they are intended to represent.

It may explain, too, my sorrow and feelings of utter frustration when confronted with the witless work of the vandal and the desecration of scenic places by official bodies and private citizens alike—man-made excrescences on the highest places in the landscape, roads which, from a vantage point, are and look like scarified wounds on the surface of the earth, gravel pits that look like ulcers, strings of pylons on contours that reveal them in their supreme ugliness, bulldozed and broken trees by the wayside, rubbish dumps, bottles broken and unbroken, tins rusted and unrusted, empty oil drums, cartons and all the rest of it—sometimes concealed but just as often dumped by the roadside for all to see—buildings in places where they should never have been built and even buildings that should never have been built at all. These are all contributions to what Robin Boyd has called 'the great Australian ugliness'. My frustration lie in the fact that education is such a slow process that there is an eternal supply of human beings who need it badly, even if it only serves to teach them the golden rule.



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In terms of goods and chattels we are reckoned to be a wealthy nation but there seem to be far too many of us who are more than anxious to reap the harvest of nature without caring a bit about the share the next generation—and the one after that—might want to enjoy. If the proportion remains constant the conservators of the future will have an even more uphill struggle than the conservators of yesterday and today. They will have to fight hard to keep the developers at bay.

The national park concept is now practically universally accepted. Each country has evolved its own standards for its national parks but no matter how the people or what the country all agree on one thing—they are places set apart for the conservation and protection of nature. To what extent the aim is achieved is largely governed by the size of the reserve and its accessibility. If there is to be a reasonable prospect of it fulfilling its purpose for the conservation of the inhabiting wildlife a national park must be extensive. Small areas may be useful for preserving geological features or distinctive land forms, but the wildlife of such areas is vulnerable to the influences of settled places on the periphery. This will be easily appreciated when one realises that a distance of just 500 metres separates the centre of a 10 ha reserve from its boundary.

A problem that confronts the managers of large national parks is that of providing accommodation and all the ancillary amenities for the visitors who may wish to explore the place. What is done in other countries and even in other Australian states is not necessarily the best practice and, within our own state, what is proper for one national park is not inevitably the practice to be followed in another. Each park is, practically by definition, unique, and requires to be treated accordingly.

This book attempts to show wherein lies the uniqueness of Wilsons Promontory National Park and, having read it, the still unwearied reader will be in a better position than others to decide for himself whether or not the Tidal River tourist village would have been better at or even outside the boundary of the Park.

*J Ros. Garnet*

*Melbourne, 1981*

## **Introduction by J. Ros. Garnet**

A map of Victoria will show, away to the south-east of Melbourne, a large tongue of land projecting into Bass Strait. Its tip is the southernmost point on the coastline of the Australian continent. This tongue, embracing some 49,000 hectares, is Wilsons Promontory National Park—a place that is something of a wonderland for

people of all sorts of tastes.

The approach by land is through the Yanakie Isthmus, which connects the Promontory to the mainland.

At one time this isthmus was one of the valleys in a system of ranges that extended across what is now Bass Strait, linking Tasmania with the continent. With the passing of time, submergence of the land left little more than the mountain tops above the level of the sea. These are now seen as the several islands of Bass Strait and the numerous islets off the shores of the Promontory. The Promontory itself is considered to be the remnant of an ancient Bunurong Range which joined the continent and Tasmania. The isthmus sank with the rest of the land and the Promontory remained as an island.

A combination of circumstances such as deposition from sluggish tides in the shallows of the present Corner Basin, from erosion of the adjacent higher ground and the accretion of wind-blown sand gradually converted the shallows of the miniature strait which separated the island 'promontory' from the northern rises to a swampy estuary which has gradually and completely filled up and reconnected the promontory to the mainland. Thus its geological history had made Yanakie Isthmus an area of special interest because, there, one may see the evidence of some of the physiographic changes that have occurred in the past.

On the mid-west side of the isthmus is Shallow Inlet, a place frequented by sea birds and waders, black swans—sometimes in thousands—and hosts of other interesting fauna, including the now-rare Cape Barren goose, while on the east side is Corner Inlet, or as it is more properly named Corner Basin, with its complement of little islands, shallows and mangrove fringes. The Isthmus has been a region much favoured for grazing cattle—an industry begun as long ago as 1843 or 1844. Despite the incessant munching of countless generations of cattle and the regularity of the summer and autumn fires to which it has been subjected, the Yanakie heathlands and sand dunes continue to harbour a rich variety of native plant and animal wildlife which, in many ways, has no counterpart on the Promontory itself.

It is different because its geological history is different. A considerable part of the isthmus, instead of being included in the national park, was alienated and developed as productive farmland, but good luck rather than good planning ensured that much of the southern sector of the isthmus remained as Crown land. In recent times public attitudes to nature conservation have changed to a degree that has persuaded the government to incorporate this southern sector of Yanakie Isthmus into the National Park. The entrance to the Park is now some 20km nearer Melbourne than it

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was when the Darby River was the point of entry. The inclusions of Yanakie South as an integral part of the park was not achieved without some concession being made to those who, for generations, had grazed their cattle on its age-old dunes, swamps and heathlands. The cattle are to be permitted to remain, but under rather more stringent control. [Cattle grazing in this area ended in the early 1990s – Ed.]

The appearance of the former entrance at the Darby River has changed almost beyond recognition since the days when it was the hub of tourist activity in the Park. In former times a chalet nestled on the river flat at the foot of Darby Hill, which is the western extension of the LaTrobe Range. Little now remains to remind one of this once-popular holiday rendezvous. It belonged to an era when there were no surfaced roads through the Yanakie Isthmus. One waited till the tide was on the ebb and then sped swiftly and quietly along the hard sandy beach of Waratah Bay, from Winchester's camp on Shallow Inlet to Buckley's Rocks, where the traveller turned inland to skirt or cross Cotter's Lagoon.

By following a sandy track for a kilometre or so, travellers entered a bushland of banksia, sheoak, tea-tree and honey-myrtle, wound their way along the troughs of the dunes and headed southward towards the river. A rough bridge spanned the stream at a point a little further downstream from the site of the present bridge, and from it one passed through an avenue of tea-tree and honey-myrtle to the chalet or camp site. Were one on a walking trip one simply scrambled over Buckley's Rocks and followed the shoreline to the mouth of the Darby River, walking through it at low tide or wading at high tide. A final scramble over the mobile dunes and further walk of less than a kilometre through a tunnel of trees and shrubs along the course of the river brought one to a recognised camping ground where, in due time, the chalet was to be built.

Those who knew this route are richer for the memories of an exhilarating experience of scudding along this moist, sandy speedway, the incautious dallying on the way even at the risk of being caught by an incoming tide. There was always plenty to see—myriads of small sand crabs, birds of one sort or another, even an occasional nautilus shell after a southerly blow.

There was, of course, the hazard of the Hummocks. The track through them was easily negotiable provided the wind had not deposited too much fine sand on top. Unless travellers knew just where the track lay in a sea of sand, they could easily get trapped. Many did. In the course of fifty years the sea has scoured away much of the original beach at the Hummocks and one can now see some of the wooden sleepers that formed a safe track for wheeled vehicles protruding midway up a low bank of sand that now forms the shoreline.

It was an adventure getting to the Darby in those days. Even the alternative route across Corner Basin by boat from Port Franklin or Port Welshpool to the Vereker Landing jetty and then overland on foot or on horseback to the Darby was an exciting experience. It has vanished. Today, a trip to the Prom entails nothing more exciting than a drive of 250 kilometres over all-weather bitumen roads, through Fish Creek or the substantial town of Foster, over the Hoddle Ranges or the Foster Hills, down to the plain of the Yanakie isthmus, across the substantial bridge that now spans the Darby River, up and over the Darby Saddle to the terminus at Tidal River nine or ten kilometres beyond the site of the old tourist centre.

The last lap of the road, carved from the granite slopes of the Saddle, offers even the most casual of tourists moments of sheer delight. At the dawn of day or at dusk, when they emerge to browse, wallabies will surely be seen on the heathlands through which the road winds its way. Small bands of emus are to be found there too, though they are far more common on the Yanakie plains. On the same heathlands and in the thick scrub of kunzea, banksia, sheoak and stunted eucalypts, birds abound, mostly unseen except by the patient and more leisurely observer.

From the top of the Darby Saddle the seascapes and panoramas are unlikely to be soon forgotten. From such heights one gazes down on scenes of rugged grandeur—the tempestuous waters of the Southern Ocean crashing on jagged cliffs, the placid waters of little bays and coves, bays and coves less quiet with rolling surf and breakers that thunder against nearby mountains, forested valleys each with its sparkling creek, heathy moorlands, small plains, river flats and sand dunes. All are part of a picture which, to our eyes, is peculiarly Australian although, indeed, the magnificence of the scenery has been likened to the Cornish coast.

With the arrival at the mouth of Tidal River where it empties into Norman Bay, the scene changes to that of a thriving village where will be found enough modern amenities to dispel any fleeting illusions of isolation in a primaeval world. Here are flats, cottages and cabins for hire, serviced with fresh water, refrigeration, electricity, gas cooking appliances and the rest of the simple comforts a modern holiday maker has come to expect. A nearby shop and a cafe provide for the everyday needs of a traveller or tourist while campers can tuck tent or car (or caravan) snugly into a space amid the tea tree on the outskirts of the settlement. From here they can repair to the cafe and restaurant for meals.

A holiday on the Promontory can be fashioned to suit one's inclinations whether they be lazy and carefree or active and equally carefree. For the less active there are tracks for quiet rambles to nearby pleasant spots— to

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the shallows of Tidal River for a swim, to Squeaky Beach on Leonard Bay to hear the musical sands resonating at each footfall, to Pillar Point for the entrancing vistas, to the Aboriginal kitchen middens by the shore of Oberon Bay or, in the warmth of a summer's day, to just laze on the broad, clean beach.

It is not easy, now, to envisage the 'Prom' as it once was—a veritable hive of human activity, more particularly on its north-eastern and eastern sides where there were timbermen, dingo hunters, fishermen, prospectors, miners, sealers and men of many other callings and occupations, all busy on their more or less lawful activities. In those far-off days tracks were many and well defined. The successions of disastrous bushfires and the effluxion of time have obliterated many of those which were so well known to bush walkers of years gone by. The tangle of undergrowth and scrub that invariably follows bushfires in this region of Victoria is likely to prove too much for most walkers and hikers, and so it will remain for a decade or two when, perhaps, in the absence of further burns, a new forest will arise and the undergrowth will fade away.

Even if, today, much of the east coast is denied to most visitors, there is still plenty to be seen and enjoyed on the western and southern coasts. From Tidal River tracks radiate to some of the most scenic parts of the Promontory, and the sturdy walker may still show his or her mettle in a trip to the lighthouse at the southern extremity of the park or in a ramble over rugged Mount Oberon which towers its granite mass 600 metres above the Southern Ocean.

The highest peak is Mount LaTrobe, 750 metres above sea level, a peak which one sees away to the north-east as one scrambles over the Oberon Saddle. But LaTrobe is only one of several mountains in the Park that rise above 600 metres. From the long backbone ridge known as the Vereker Range subsidiary ranges extend to both the east and west. With such a system one can expect an abundance of valleys, each with its clear mountain stream and little waterfalls. In an environment of that kind the vegetation is sure to be rich and diversified. In fact, visitors who are at all interested in wildlife will be well satisfied with a sojourn on the Promontory.

Botanists will be rewarded with the sight of up to 700 species of native vascular plants—a number approaching a quarter of the entire vascular flora of Victoria. Some plants, like other forms of the wildlife of the park, are rare or uncommon, or perhaps even extinct as a consequence of the fires that have from time to time swept its large expanse. Koalas which once abounded, notably at Barrys Creek over on Corner Basin and at Sealers Cove on the east coast, are rare enough to be remarked upon when seen, but they are still about and appear in unexpected places such as Lilly Pilly

Gully, Pillar Point, Yanakie and Tidal River itself. Other marsupials and placentals such as wombats, possums, rodents and wallabies have spread to many parts of the park, echidnas are not uncommon and a lucky observer may even see a platypus. Some of the lesser known animals are more likely to be seen by those who like to do their exploring by spotlight. They are the species, like bats, possums and phascogales, whose daily activities begin at or soon after sunset and end at sunrise.

Alien creatures have also established themselves in the park. Apart from the cattle on Yanakie, the park is now the home of the little Hog Deer which are sometimes seen browsing around the settlement at Tidal River, the fox which has successfully resisted all efforts directed towards its extirpation, the rabbit which is probably there to stay despite continuing control programs, an occasional goat—perhaps by now, discovered and despatched—and, of course, the domestic cat gone wild. Wild dogs seem no longer to be a problem. Among the couple of hundred species of birds seen on the Promontory from time to time, no trouble will be experienced in recognising the introduced starling, blackbird and sparrow which are multiplying at the expense of native birds. Starlings have been there for nearly a century but blackbirds were first seen there in 1925. Like rabbits, they are there to stay. A goat, by the way, was last seen by the writer in October 1961. It is believed that he (or she) was one of a small herd (or a descendant thereof) that escaped from the lighthouse reserve when the fence of that enclosure was destroyed during the great 1951 bushfire. The animal seen ten years later had travelled the length of the Promontory to the Beehives on the shore of Corner Basin!

A disturbing factor in the program of preservation of the wildlife of the Promontory has been the continuance of cattle grazing within the boundaries of the National Park. It is one which might have been avoided had those responsible for its management given rather more thought than they did to the consequences and, perhaps more importantly, had they been in a position to forego the small amount of revenue they gleaned from the practice of issuing grazing licences and leases.

The animals spread alien weeds in their wake, trampled down the vegetation of the accessible grassy flats, converted the marshlands into bogs and fouled the streams in the vicinity of the favoured grazing grounds. And, of course, the cattlemen with their horses and dogs contributed to the despoliation. To them it was scarcely noticeable because it took place so slowly. What was easily perceived was the abundance of lush, green grass that appeared after the mandatory summer and autumn fires which the cattlemen lit to 'clean up' the flats and heathy slopes so that more cattle might be



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grazed. Happily, that phase of mismanagement is over for good.

Yes. Wilsons Promontory National Park, in the County of Buln Buln and the Shire of South Gippsland, is indeed a place for a holiday with a difference. Golf, tennis, football and cricket can all be forgotten there. The complications of urban life may, for a spell, become, perchance, dim memories. Neither trains nor trams (nor horses now) can be our masters there. Even the comfort of the useful motor car can be eschewed while legs once more come into their own. Eyes, tired with the glare of brick and bitumen, can regain their sparkle as they sweep the wide horizons. Lungs can breathe deeply of the salt-tanged air of the sea or the scent-laden breeze from the bush and heathland.

Wilsons Promontory National Park is yours and mine. We hold it in trust for the generations yet to come. As with each of our national parks, it is there for the education, enjoyment and edification of all people for all time, for the protection and preservation of its supreme scenery and its native plant and animal wildlife. Each of us who visits the park does so as a trustee or as an owner who wants it to retain unimpaired all those values which now appeal to us. Only care and good management can achieve this aim. Care costs nothing, but good management is obtainable only at a price. In the past Victorians have depended on the good offices of a few private citizens who strove to do what they could with what small sums they could raise to look after the state's several national parks, but today their control and management rest with a statutory National Parks Service which operates within a Ministry of Conservation. As an earnest of our part-ownership of the national parks each of us, as a taxpayer, contributes to the fund that allows the Service to operate. As far as Wilsons Promontory National Park is concerned the prime aim of the Service is to endeavour to ensure that none of the charms of the park shall be lost or diminished—and the hope is that that aim is humanly possible.

Sometimes it is difficult to reconcile the interests of visitors to the park with the requirement of nature conservation, but it is hoped that the pages that follow will lead to an understanding of the problems that beset the Service and that will continue to do so. Should it sometimes appear that its solutions to some of them favour the nature lovers and naturalists, remember that these people are ordinary citizens like us. If they differ at all in their demands it is that they demand so little—simply the right to observe Nature in all her moods in a place where those moods are ceaselessly changing and in a place meant just for that.

[The National Parks Service became part of Parks Victoria in 1996. Ed.]



# Chapter 1: The European Discovery of Wilsons Promontory

The European history of Wilsons Promontory began on the morning of 2nd January, 1798.

On that date George Bass and his six companions, on their famous whaleboat expedition from Port Jackson to Western Port, sighted the 'high, hummocky land' which was considered to be that described by Tobias Furneaux who, in the *Adventure*, had become separated from Cook during the great Second Voyage in 1773. Surely it could be nothing other than the eastward aspect of Furneaux Land!

On the return journey from Western Port easterly gales forced them to shelter in a small, quiet bay which Bass named Sealers Cove. His use of the appellation 'Sealers' rather than 'Seal' suggests that, perhaps, Bass was not the first mariner to have entered the Cove. Was it so named because he recognised it as a place suited to the needs of a future sealing industry or because he had seen some evidence that sealers already knew the place?

Van Diemens Land sealers and Yankee whalers were, even at that time, busy in the waters of the Southern Ocean and had bases in Van Diemen's Land. The east coast of this promontory was almost certainly known to some seafarers—sealers among them—but their interests would have been centred on matters other than marine and land surveying and such official activities. In his account of the voyage Bass gives no indication of the surprise the party must have experienced at the sight of smoke signals from one of the islands off the south-west coast of the Promontory—an island now presumed to be one of the Glennies, near Oberon Bay. Investigation revealed seven of what had been a larger party of convicts who, in a stolen whaleboat, had escaped from Port Jackson. For reasons now unknown, the seven men had been marooned, were taken aboard by Bass while the remaining five were ferried across to the mainland and put ashore somewhere on the west coast—possibly at some point along the shore of Waratah Bay—furnished with a few essentials for survival and left to find their own way to civilisation. It seems that, on the homeward journey, Bass's party saw the five in the vicinity of Corner Inlet and this might be taken to indicate that the group was heading in the right direction. Sydney Cove was the only settlement then in existence on the continent. They were not seen again by Europeans.

The exposure of human bones in the sandhills of Yanakie some years ago caused speculation about their origin and it was suggested that they may have been the remains of one or more of this unhappy band of castaway convicts. Since Bass is understood to have seen them on the eastern side of Corner Inlet it is highly unlikely that they would have back-tracked across the isthmus. Doubtless they were the bones of Aborigines.



George Bass's map showing Western Port, Wilsons Promontory and Sealers Cove, 1797-98.

Photo courtesy Historic Places, Department of Sustainability and Environment, Victoria

been taken. Another ten years saw what was practically the end of a very lucrative industry in those favoured waters. Few seals remained!

The passing of more than a century and a half, during which time sealing has been more or less controlled, has seen the very gradual re-establishment of seal colonies in places where they once thrived, although the present populations are but a small fraction of the number slaughtered in the heyday of the industry. The pots and other appurtenances which once decorated Sealers Cove and Refuge Cove have long since vanished either by decay or by submergence beneath sand and water.

From Sealers Cove Bass continued on to Corner Inlet where he was again obliged to shelter for several days. The enforced interruption to their progress gave the party an opportunity for some further exploration in that sector of the Promontory. It was while cruising in Corner Inlet the voyagers once more saw the five convicts.

After leaving the Inlet the party put into Wingan Inlet to search, without success, for the anchor lost there during the outward journey. They then made their way to Port Jackson which was reached on 25th February, twelve weeks after the commencement of the heroic voyage.

Subsequent consideration must have convinced Bass that the land he had rounded was not Furneaux Land. The matter was resolved later in the year when he and Flinders circumnavigated Van Diemen's Land and charted the Furneaux group of islands. Governor Hunter adopted the joint recommendation of Flinders and Bass that the 'high, hummocky land' be known as Wilson's Promontory—in honour of Thomas Wilson. Wilson is generally referred to as 'a London merchant and friend





Matthew Flinders' map of the Victorian coast from Port Phillip to Wilson's Promontory, c.1800.

of Flinders', but, in the absence of any amplification, this seems an inadequate reason for him being thus commemorated. Another and less well-known legend has it that he was the tutor of Bass during the latter's student days after he had served his apprenticeship to an apothecary, Dr Francis of Boston. It may well have been that he was indeed a friend of Flinders, too.

There is still another story about the origin of the name—one which is perfectly reasonable. In the *Sydney Morning Herald* of 28-10-1922 the following letter to the editor appeared:

*Mrs Mary Graham was a daughter of William Wilson, who died during the 1840s. On 12-10-1922 (in a letter to the editor) James H Watson denied that Lieut. Wm. Wilson had anything to do with it [the naming of the Promontory] at all or, I suppose, was even present.*

*In the vicinity of The Bluff, Captain Flinders, William Wilson and another, put off from H.M.S. Reliance in the captain's dinghy and, no beach being seen, Wm. Wilson jumped on to a rock (losing a shoe)—all sailors wore shoes. Captain Flinders wrote in his pocket book "We shall now name this land Wilsons Promontory", and tore the leaf out of the book and handed it to Wm. Wilson who put it in his pocket while on the rock.*

*The Thos. Wilson mentioned by your correspondent, Mr. Watson, was a near relative and close friend of the Flinders family and he was the father of Lieut. Wm. Wilson who stood on the rock. My father, who was the eldest son of Lieut. Wilson, and my mother were born very early in the last century at Kissing Point and King street, Sydney respectively. Wm. Wilson brought some pine trees from Norfolk Island which were planted on land near 'Tin Can' Corner of Phillip and Brady Streets and a few transplanted to the Botanic Gardens.*

*Jas. A. Wilson  
Vaucluse.*

The following quotation from J. H. Heaton's *Australian Dictionary of Dates and Men of the Times* (Sydney, 1879) tends to enhance the likelihood of J. A. Wilson's story being true:

*Mr William Wilson was an officer on board H.M.S. Reliance, Captain Flinders, of which Mr Bass was surgeon. After passing through Bass's Strait, so called after the doctor, they sighted the headland and left the ship in the cockboat in charge of Mr Wilson. As they got to the small beach on the north side he jumped ashore first, the point where he landed being thenceforth*



Site of Biddy's Camp (Singapore Peninsula, north-east corner of Wilsons Promontory) from the sea.  
Photo courtesy Historic Places, Department of Sustainability and Environment, Victoria

*called Wilson's "Promontory". Mr Wilson was the first who planted the Norfolk Island pine in New South Wales ... His son was the first man who left New South Wales to import draught horses from England (1798).*

This present writer has sought but failed to find any official document issued by Governor Hunter wherein he expresses specific approval of the Flinders-Bass recommendation that the landmark be named 'Wilson's Promontory' in honour of Thomas Wilson or, indeed, any other Wilson. Now, nearly two centuries later, does it really matter?

## Coast Surveys

Bass had not concerned himself with a detailed examination of the coastline of the Promontory and its environs and place names ascribable to him are few. The subsequent voyage in the 25-ton *Norfolk* confirmed the use of names such as Sealers Cove and Corner Inlet (and, of course, Western Port). It also brought official recognition of Wilsons Promontory and Bass Strait (at the time occasionally referred to as 'Mr Bass's Strait').

The filling in of the detail was begun by Lieut. James Grant R.N., Commander of *H.M.S. Lady Nelson*. During the years 1799 and 1800 Grant charted a considerable stretch of the southern coastline and named a number of the navigational land marks on the Promontory. In 1841 Thomas Townsend, Assistant Government surveyor charted Corner Inlet and the adjacent seas and islands. During the years 1842 and 1843 Commander J.L. Stokes, on the survey ship *H.M.S. Beagle*, worked

from Refuge Cove and Waterloo Bay to Shallow Inlet. Six years later G.D. Smythe contracted to survey from Corner Inlet to Cape Wellington. In the 1860s Cox and Wilkinson carried out further soundings in the same area and in 1869 and 1870 Navigating Lieut. H.J. Stanley, R.N., officer in charge of the admiralty and Colonial Marine Survey, undertook an important and detailed survey of coastal features at Port Albert, Corner Inlet and the Promontory.

Although the Promontory shoreline was well defined by these several surveys, the hinterland remained almost unknown territory during the first three or four decades following the voyages of Bass and Flinders—unknown, at least, to the inhabitants of the Port Phillip District. Curiously enough it was more familiar to the merchants and mariners of Hobart Town and Port Jackson, to people who had occasion to travel to and from those two settlements. Its eastern seaboard offered several safe anchorages and quiet bays where passing ships might call to restock with fuel or water and where their passengers might even disembark for a spell of recreation. So long as the sealing industry and its successor, the whaling industry, lasted these coves and bays would have been lively enough places with plenty of visitors from across the Strait or from Port Jackson. In fact, for them, it appeared to be much easier to visit the Promontory than it was to visit Melbourne.

One of the callers, the botanist Baxter, is known to have collected plant specimens there during the period from 1823 to 1825. His specimens are still in their folders in the Kew Herbarium, England. His is

the first known plant collection ever made on the Promontory—one which anticipated that of Ferdinand Mueller by more than a quarter of a century! Doubtless other serious-minded people would have been among the visitors of those early days but, at a time when an excursion away from the convict settlements was an adventure, such accounts as those visitors may have written have been lost or their value overshadowed by those of exploration and adventure of far greater significance to the inhabitants of the fast-growing Australian Colonies.

Callers of another sort also arrived on those shores from time to time—escaped convicts from Botany Bay and even from Van Diemens Land. The small party found by Bass has already been mentioned but adventurousness or despair led many others around Cape Howe or across the Strait in the hope of reaching freedom. Chance or good navigation would have brought some, at least, to the inhabited places near Alberton or Port Albert (founded in the early 1840s) and on the Promontory. One such was a woman convict, now remembered by the name ‘Biddy’. She settled herself near Mount Singapore on the peninsula of that name and she remained there long enough for her abode to become known as ‘Biddy’s Camp’—a name that it still bears. Perhaps Biddy selected the spot because it was remote from the more organised communities where there were troopers and magistrates, because it had a permanent supply of fresh water and it was not so isolated as to be inaccessible to those who roamed over Singapore Peninsula or who had reason to voyage in the adjacent waters of Corner Basin and the Inlet. It is evident that the place was lively enough to provide for her needs.

A search of available records has failed to indicate precisely when Biddy was in occupation of her camp, nor for how long but, by inference, it can be believed that it was during the period when Buchanan and Bell operated the timber mill at Sealers Cove and while that same company grazed its stock on Singapore Peninsula—roughly, about 1850. It seems that her presence in the area was known to the stockmen because, as legend has it, she was given employment on the ‘station’ and, through the intervention of the owner or occupant of the ‘run’, she was forgiven her sins and enrolled into free society—such as it was and what there was of it.

## The Wreck of the *Clonmel*

From the time of its discovery by Flinders and Bass more than 40 years elapsed before the people of the Port Phillip settlement began to display much interest in the hinterland of the Promontory.

Curiously enough, this interest stemmed from a sea-



Sealers' huts at Lady Bay (now Refuge Cove), Wilsons Promontory.

Photo courtesy Historic Places, Department of Sustainability and Environment, Victoria

faring incident—from the misfortune of the owners, passengers and skipper of the 52-ton paddle steamer *Clonmel*. The first of a line of passenger steamers to ply between Port Phillip and Port Jackson, it arrived in the Colony in December 1840 and, on its second voyage, ran onto a sandbank during its passage along the route from Cape Howe to Wilsons Promontory.

About 35 km east of Corner Inlet the ship stuck fast and, for many years, it remained a landmark for enterprising salvagers and explorers. The sad story, told in language that would be hard to match, appeared in the Port Phillip Herald of 8 January, 1841:

*“The lo Paens which resounded a month ago on the arrival of the first steamer, the Clonmel, at this port, have scarcely ceased to vibrate in our ears, when the melancholy duty is imposed upon us of chaunting her funeral dirge. The noble steamship Clonmel—this annihilator of space—this condenser of time...this Argo which would have brought many a Jason to our modern Colchis in search of the golden fleece is, we lament to have to say, a wreck, being now fixed on a reef off Corner Inlet ... To convey to a stranger in words the sensation created in our community by the melancholy tidings of her loss would be a difficult task. Indeed, it seemed as if some grievous calamity had befallen us; ... had it not been for the oral testimony of Mr D. C. Simson, who came up from the wreck in an open whaleboat, the report would have been at once attributed to one of those thousand-and-one vagaries which rumour, with her hundred-tongued mouth, is so apt to trumpet forth, when we have been some time without arrivals or news.”*

The reporter then went on to record the ‘plain, unvarnished narrative’ by Mr Simson. It purported to convey to the Herald’s readers “a picture of courage



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and self-devotion of which our national history teems with innumerable instance; nevertheless, characteristic as they are of the British sailor, each occasion of their recurrence reflects additional lustre on his country and his profession."

Mr Simson's narrative, recorded in about 2000 words, is an historical document if only for the reason that it gives a first-hand account of an event which led to the settlement by Europeans of a whole new province of New South Wales — the province that was to become the Gippsland of today.

It is quoted hereunder, with few omissions:

*"On Wednesday afternoon, on 30th December (1840) I embarked on board the steam-ship Clonmel, Lieut. Tollervey, commander, bound from Sydney to Port Phillip. The passengers and crew consisted of seventy-five individuals. At 4 p.m. rounded the south head of Port Jackson, wind from the southward, blowing fresh. Next morning, 31st, found us off Jarvis's Bay; wind still average with a strong head sea, the vessel progressing at an average of seven knots an hour. At daylight, 1st January, Cape Howe bore WSW of us; in the course of the morning sighted Ram Head, and took a fresh departure, steering for Wilson's Promontory. The wind was now fair with smooth sea and out course SW half-W' the wind and weather continuing favourable during day and night. A little after 3 a.m. 2nd January, all the passengers were startled by the ship striking heavily. On reaching the deck I discovered breakers ahead; the captain who had been on deck during the whole of the middle watch giving orders to back a-stern and doing all in his power to rescue the ship from her perilous situation. Finding that the engines were of no avail in backing her off the bank on which we found she had now struck, orders were given to lighten her by throwing overboard cargo, etc., but without the desired effect, the vessel still surging higher upon the reef. The anchors were then let go when, after a few more bumps, she swung head to wind, taking the ground with her stern, bedding herself, with the fall of the tide, upon the sand, rolling hard and striking occasionally. .... Daylight had now made its appearance and we found ourselves on shore on a sandspit at the entrance of Corner Inlet, about half a mile from the beach between which and the vessel a heavy surf was rolling. It is necessary here to remark that the course steered and the distance run would not have warranted any person in believing us so near the shore as we actually found ourselves. The sea [had been] smooth, the wind fair and the vessel going at the rate of at least 10 knots an hour and it was impossible for any navigator to have*

*calculated upon an inset carrying a vessel under the circumstances above alluded to, 30 or 40 miles to leeward of her course in eighteen hours.*

*Captain Tollervey's conduct had hitherto been that of a careful and watchful commander; he was on deck during the whole of the middle watch, which he himself kept, anxiously on the lookout and was on the paddle box at the time the vessel struck but the night proving misty, nothing could be seen beyond the length of the vessel. .... Capt. T, on finding all attempts to get the vessel off by running kedges and warps out, throwing overboard cargo etc., unavailing, and a strong sea rising with the flood tide, turned his attention to the safety of the passengers and crew. After several trips by the whale-boats and assisted by the quarter-boats afterwards, every soul was landed safely by 2 pm., the captain being the last to leave the vessel. A sufficiency of sails, awnings and lumber was brought on shore to rig up tents for all hands and everybody set to work to form an encampment. In a short time the ladies and females were comfortably housed, having beds placed for them in a weather proof tent. The male passengers were equally accommodated by means of spare sails and awnings brought from the ship and we found ourselves at sun-down as well provided for as we, under the circumstances, could desire. A sufficiency of provisions consisting of live-stock, hams, bread, flour, biscuit, rice, tea, sugar, wines and beer had been landed during the forenoon to keep the whole party for about ten days; water was found in abundance by digging but was rather brackish to the taste. Captain T. now brought order into the chaotic mass by establishing watches, previously haranguing the passengers and crew, explaining to them the stronger necessity which existed under their unfortunate circumstances for discipline and punctual obedience of orders than would have been necessary on board his noble vessel had she been afloat. .... Sentinels posted in all directions round the encampment, were relieved every two hours.*

*When order was thus established Captain T. and myself laid down in the tent and talked the events of the day over. He agreed...that it would be desirable that a boat be sent to Melbourne for relief and, having obtained his consent to head the party, I had no trouble in finding a crew of five volunteers to join me in the undertaking. One of my fellow passengers, Mr Edwards, volunteered to join us and the next morning, amidst the cheers of our fellow sufferers, we were launched by them from the beach in a whale-boat. We proceeded in the first instance to the vessel to lay in a store of provisions, not wishing to deprive those onshore*

of any portion of their scanty stock. Owing to the very heavy surf which was rolling on the beach, we were nearly two hours before we reached our ill-starred ship, being every moment in danger of swamping. The scene which now opened on ascending the deck was harassing in the extreme; a few hours before, this stately vessel had been cleaving the waters, buoyant, like its living inmates, with life and hope, now an immovable wreck; ..... As our time was short we supplied ourselves with such provisions as came within our reach and, after hoisting the Union Jack to the mainmast, upside down, we shoved off and committed ourselves to the care of a merciful Providence. At 8 am the 3rd inst. we took our departure, outside the bank, steering for Sealer's Cove. Our boat was manned by five seamen and, beside ours, we had a small lug-sail made our of the awning. ... Our provisions consisted of biscuit, a ham, a breaker of water, three bottles of wine, 12 of beer and one of brandy. Of the latter article I would not take more, dreading its effects upon the crew. The small quantity I took, however, I found very beneficial, administered to them in minute portions. Shortly after leaving the Clonmel the wind came from the westward; we were obliged to down sail and pull, and after six hours vain struggling against the wind to reach the mainland, we were under the necessity of running for one of the seal islands where we found a snug little cove which we entered and, by refreshing the crew with a three hours rest and hearty meal we once more pulled for the mainland and reached Sealer's Cove about midnight, where we landed, cooked our supper and passed the remainder of the night in the boat which we anchored in deep water. At half past 3 am. on the 4th inst. I started three men on shore to get the breaker filled with water; they had scarcely filled them and brought them down to the beach, when I observed the natives coming down upon us. I hurried them on board and got under weigh, the wind blowing hard from the eastward at the time. After a severe pull of four hours we were at last able to weather the southern point of the Cove, to hoist sail and run for Wilson's Promontory which we rounded at 10 am. .... At 8 pm. we brought up in a small bay at the eastern entrance of Western Port ..... After a refreshing night's repose on the sandy beach we started next morning at the break of day, happy in finding ourselves so near the end of our voyage. Having a strong and steady breeze from the eastward we sailed along very fast before it, although we were in imminent danger of being swamped, the sea having risen very considerably and breaking

over us repeatedly. At 2 pm. we were abreast of the Port Phillip Heads but, to our extreme mortification, when within a mile of being within a secure harbour we found the strong ebb tide created such a ripple and so much broken water, that I did not consider it prudent to run over it. We were therefore obliged to keep the boat's head to windward from that time until the flood tide would make; we were in this tantalizing situation for four hours when, to our inexpressible relief and joy, we saw a cutter making for the heads and, bearing down upon her, found her to be the Sisters, Captain Mulhall, to whose hospitable reception I cannot do sufficient justice. He took our boat in tow and ourselves on board and landed us at William's Town at 11 pm.; having been thus 63 hours from the time we left the ship to the time we landed at the beach."

As a postscript to the above narrative the *Port Phillip Herald* reporter noted that, among the passengers, were Mr and Mrs Walker (Mrs Walker being a daughter of Mr Blaxland, M.L.C., *Clonmel* provided her with a second experience of shipwreck), Mr Goodwin, who owned half of the cargo, Mr Robinson who had charge of £3,000 worth of Union Bank currency notes (which were not recovered by any of the official salvagers!) and Mr and Mrs Cashmore, newly wed, who had shipped a large quantity of goods "for the new establishment to be opened at the corner of Collins and Elizabeth streets." The reporter was sorry to have to add that the fire-men and some others "acted in a most disgraceful manner."

Only a short time before the wreck of the *Clonmel* word had reached Melbourne of the wreck of the *Isobella* at King Island and the then recently appointed Port Phillip Harbour Master, Captain Charles Lewis, went to the scene of the wreck in the Harbour Authority's cutter *Sisters* which was commanded by Captain Mulhall. It was on the return journey from this venture that the cutter picked up the crew of *Clonmel*'s whaleboat at the Port Phillip Heads. Lewis organised a rescue operation expeditiously and, next day, set sail in the *Sisters* for Corner Inlet. Another and slower boat, *Will Watch*, followed. Between them the rest of the crew and passengers were brought to Melbourne. Of the ship's complement of 75 only Captain Tollervey suffered any injury as a consequence of the disaster. He was lamed for life by a leg injury.

While Lewis was examining the wreck and estimating the possibility of salvage, Mulhall manoeuvred his cutter through the maze of sandbanks and channels to an anchorage close to the Snake Island encampment and, with the assistance of *Will Watch*, took aboard the seventy. The return voyage was delayed a little because some of the stranded party had decided to fill in time

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by exploring the environs of the island in *Clonmel's* longboat. (Lewis had had the forethought to include in the rescue party a platoon of the 28th Regiment (at that time stationed in Melbourne) to guard the wreck and salvageable cargo. The small band of explorers rowed along a channel that led them into the estuary of a stream which later became known as the Albert River, and it seems they followed it upstream to an area which was to become Port Albert. Meanwhile Lewis, in his search for safe passageways for the salvage ships which were expected to operate as soon as they became available, plumbed the waters in the other direction—easterly, towards Corner Basin. He located the channel that follows the northern shore of the island and heads to the site of the present Welshpool.

Thus it was that he actually entered Corner Basin which, on his return to Melbourne on 15th January, he described as 'a noble lake with a navigable passage' and expanse of water that might prove to become a magnificent harbour. The channel he followed is now called the Lewis Channel. It may be of interest to record that one of the channel lights was built by one Lasseter, the same surname as the adventurous character who, more than a century later, ended his days searching for a gold reef he had previously stumbled on somewhere in Central Australia.

The wreck of the *Clonmel* and its aftermath was dealt with at length in the columns of the *Port Phillip Herald*, the *Port Phillip Gazeteer* and the *Port Phillip Patriot* and, in due course, in the Sydney and Van Diemen's Land newspapers. The main Port Phillip references are to be read in the papers issued between the dates 8th January and 16th April, 1841. However they should be read with a certain degree of circumspection

because of the difficulty encountered by the reporters of obtaining unbiased or even authoritative accounts for publication. It seems that the obligatory official enquiry was a secretive affair but the public was left with the impression that Captain Tollervey was not blameworthy and with the suspicion that the fault lay with the ship's first mate. The *Clonmel* owners appear to have been adequately covered by insurance, the several owners of its cargo appear to have lost heavily and the less wealthy passengers were obliged to suffer their losses without much in the way of compensation. As for the cargo, some of it was salvaged as quickly as possible. Efforts at salvaging the ship itself had to be abandoned after a few trials and the owners settled for selling the wreck for £110. At intervals during the next two years salvage operations continued until most of the removable equipment had been recovered. Parts of the engine were saved but the boilers proved irrecoverable and they, with what was left of the hull, are said to be still visible when wind and wave scours the site on Clonmel Island—the sandbank where the ship finally settled after being washed ashore about nine kilometres beyond the point of its first impact. The Port Phillip Gazette of 2nd August, 1843 draws the veil over the rest of the story of the *Clonmel* when it, not quite accurately, stated the "the *Portenia* had brought to Sydney the whole of the wreck of this fine steamer."

The present writer has been unable to locate a picture of the *Clonmel*, but in the Port Albert Historical Museum may be seen at least two relics of the vessel—a brass boiler plate and one of its cannons.





## Chapter 2: The Pastoral Runs of Wilsons Promontory

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**A**t the time, the influence of the wreck of the *Clonmel* on developments on Wilsons Promontory itself was only slight, but as the years went by the effects of settlement in the coastal areas of the mainland began to make themselves apparent. The wreck was at the only spot on that part of the coast which at the time could give access to the interior and, had the ship not come to grief there, it is possible that the opening up of the province would have been delayed for many years.

It will be recalled that Angus McMillan and his party, after a gruelling trek over the mountains from Omeo, reached the Old Port, north of present-day Port Albert and not far from the entrance to Corner Basin, on the 13th February, 1840—precisely the day the *Singapore* party reached Corner Inlet.

McMillan was not the kind of man who would invite the public to share the proceeds of his explorations but the Port Albert Company was much less reticent. Others soon proceeded to occupy pastoral holdings in an area which might otherwise have remained unknown to any but McMillan and his employers.

By 1844 there were at least 40 holdings in Gippsland, carrying about 20,000 head of cattle and 62,000 sheep. Within a year the number of stations had increased to 100, carrying between them 30,000 cattle and 100,000 sheep - an astonishingly rapid development in a colony of which the main district centre, Melbourne, had yet to be properly surveyed. Most of the old 'runs' are scarcely remembered now.

The passing of the first Land Settlement Act in 1860 began a long process of settlement under altered terms of tenure and acquisition. The big holdings disappeared. In the meantime, while they were in their heyday, they were rip-roaring days at places such as Alberton and the Old Port. A chronicler of the times mentioned that, because of the long delays in auctioning the land, most of the prospective settlers of Alberton departed for other places and their places were taken 'by a swarm of escaped convicts, noisy men and undesirable women'.

For a time the township had an unenviable reputation until the police captured the convicts and drove the 'riff-raff' out of the town.

Possibly this was the time when Biddy chose to live on the Promontory. It did not escape the 'pastoral run' boom and Biddy would not have had to live a life of solitude during this enterprising period.

G.D Smythe of Alberton, the contract surveyor who had carried out a coast survey from Corner Inlet to Cape Wellington during the years 1848-49, was among the first of the landholders in the vicinity of the Promontory. In 1849 he took out an annual grazing license for 19,200 acres on Waratah Bay - a holding which, in the following year, he claimed as the Cape Liptrap Run at the

scheduled rental - and he seems to have applied himself assiduously to pastoral pursuits until 1859. In that year the Run passed to R.J Morgan, who forfeited it in 1863.

Two years later the licence was taken up by John Elliot and then, in 1867 by George Black.

Richard Bennison, also in 1850, occupied the 16,640-acre Yanakie Run which he managed to retain for about six years. It then came under the joint ownership of Mary McKeitch and Henry Davis. Three years later it was taken over by Hugh Reoch who held it until 1865, the year when the Promontory was thrown open for selection.

The Bennisons were an English couple with several children but apparently Mrs Bennison was the only member of the family to survive the six years on Yanakie. The eldest child died as a consequence of a compassionate act by his father.

Mrs Bennison survived her husband by many years. The local people last heard of her when she held a 'levee' in Melbourne - an event reported in the social columns of the press. She was about 90 years old at the time - quite evidently a lady born of hardy stock. A story told of one of her exploits rather confirms this impression - the youngest child James Abel had been in the Sale hospital and Mrs Bennison undertook the task of bringing him home to Yanakie. The track from Sale to the Corner Inlet fishing village would have been exhausting enough for most women but, undaunted, she continued the journey and was ferried across the Basin to the Homestead landing. The boat arrived after sunset but there was no one to meet her, simply because there was no means of advising her husband of the date and time of her intended return. The homestead was about four kilometres away but off she set with the child in her arms - a lonely walk over sand dunes along a scarcely defined track in the darkness of night with her babe for her sole companion. Those who know Yanakie will understand just what a feat of endurance this trek would have been.

Mrs Bennison is the authority for the presently understood meaning of the word 'Yanakie'. She is said to have once explained that it was an Aboriginal word meaning 'Up and come back again' - a phrase which becomes intelligible if one remembers that it was the Aborigines' way of describing the most conspicuous feature of the region - the sand dunes.

The original boundaries of Yanakie and its adjoining Runs are not remembered with certainty but the incumbents of Yanakie must have had the opportunity of leasing the several grazing areas on the Promontory which had been surveyed by Thomas Nutt in 1842 and 1843. They included a Run of 14,700 acres at Sealers Cove, 25,000 acres at Mount Singapore, 25,000 acres at Corner Inlet and 33,000 acres at Oberon Bay. In addition

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to these there was a small 4,000-acre Run at the Darby River. It (or at least Section 1 of it) was surveyed into six blocks, the coastal boundary of which was the northwest boundary of the Oberon Bay Run. The inland boundaries evidently were about three miles in from the coast and thus would have embraced Darby Hill and the river flats back to the foot of the western side of Mount Vereker.

As some 22,000 acres at the southern end of the Promontory was reserved and excluded from grazing and selection it is apparent that approximately 200 square miles of land was involved. As this was about 40 square miles in excess of the total area of the Promontory proper it is obvious that the Corner Inlet Run must have included a large tract of the Yanakie Isthmus. The boundary between Yanakie Station and the Corner Inlet Station doubtless lay along what was termed 'the settled area line' which was drawn from the Yanakie landing to a point somewhere along the bank of the lower reaches of the Darby River.

The Darby River formed the south boundary of the Yanakie Station. To its north was the 34,000-acre John Hugh (or Foster) Run. This run was acquired at auction in 1865 by Joshua Cowell but forfeited by him three years later. It extended from the south-east of the Hoddle Ranges to the shore of Corner Basin. To its west was George Black's Tarwin East Run of 15,360 acres and next to it, on the south side, was the 38,000-acre Shallow Inlet Run.

The existence of Darby River Run is hard to explain. It appears to have been something of an enclave. Perhaps its 4,000 acres was reckoned as being economically equivalent to the manyfold larger Runs which adjoined it. However, it seems to have existed as a separate entity for only a relatively short time—probably much less than nine years, during which time, if it was occupied at all, it was possibly held by a man named Darby. Unfortunately the records examined have thrown little light on this early phase of its history. Darby is but a name.

In July, 1859 Maxwell Drew applied for the lease of the Run and his correspondence with the Commissioner of Lands tells a very little about it.

Drew mentioned that the distance from Darby River to Bolter's Bay beach was about eight miles. The track, presumably, was the surveyed access road to the Oberon Bay Run. The distance given indicates that Bolter's Bay is what is now known as Leonard Bay.

Although Drew believed that Reoch, who was at the time in possession of Yanakie, had no interest in the Darby River Run, he was probably mistaken. His application was refused and the Run must have remained as a kind of appurtenance to Yanakie or, possibly, to the Shallow Inlet Run.

Settlement schemes in the early days were more in the nature of experiments undertaken in the light of all the mistakes and difficulties experienced during the years of administration from Sydney (and London). Some of the experiments were more successful than others but the occupants of marginal lands such as those south of latitude 38°45' were inclined to be more optimistic than businesslike.

The Government was anxious enough to keep (and increase) settlers on the land and, to this end, Victoria's first Land Settlement Act was passed in 1860—just five years after the establishment of responsible government in the new Colony which itself had come into being in 1850. One of the consequences of the Act was the alienation of more than four million acres of Victorian Crown lands, and this entailed some re-definition of the boundaries of many of the Runs as and when they were relinquished by their occupants.

The Government's closer settlement policy seems to have crystallised by 1865 and one result of that long process was that the Promontory Runs were thrown open for selection. R. Goldsborough and Hugh Parker took over Yanakie from Reoch. With Noyes as manager they held it for four years.

John and Will Baragwanath applied for and obtained the Sealers' Cove Run which they held for almost six years. They took up residence on the rocky, windswept and storm-wracked headland at the northern end of Sealers Cove—probably overlooking Five Mile Beach and the Cove.

About the time of their arrival there the collier *Natal* was wrecked on the beach, off Rabbit Island, and John and his brother bought the rights to the wreck. With the material thus acquired they built and equipped their homestead. They also built '*a sweet-lined carvel quarter-decked boat with two masts*' and named her *Lily*.

Twice a year John and Willy would sail to Port Albert for supplies. The Port was at that time a small fishing village of two general stores, a bank, bakery and Custom House.

Occasionally they would sail to Melbourne, tying up at Andersons Inlet on the first night out and, next day, making their landfall at Little Dock in Melbourne. These trips were made for the purpose of disposing of the produce of the 'Station'. Whatever this might have been is hard to imagine unless it was animal pelts. The boat would not have been big enough to carry timber in merchantable quantity and, in any case, the timber in the region of Sealers Cove had been milled out in the 1840s when Van Diemen's Land timbermen extracted most of the Blackwood for ship building and other constructional works.

The mill operated by Turnbolls Company of Port

Albert was almost certainly still operating during the period of occupation of the Run by the Baragwanaths and consequently the place would not have been quite as lonely as would otherwise have been the case.

The Sealers Cove Run, like the other Promontory Runs, was intended for cattle raising and fattening, but coast disease defeated the Baragwanaths.

Oddly enough, wild scrub cattle survived in good condition. This phenomenon seems to have inspired nearly all the cattlemen of the early days to persist in grazing stock on the Promontory. If the scrub cattle could thrive why should not their beasts?

The reason is not far to seek.

The wild cattle were few in number. They could roam free wished and their choice of food was quite varied. Baragwanath used to shoot them for meat in preference to shooting his own scraggy beasts.

After struggling on for a few years on his Sealers Cove Run he gave up and crossed to the Corner Inlet Run where he settled at what is now known as Barry's Hill. He is said to have built himself a substantial home there. From there he moved across the Basin to a property on the Agnes River at Toora. Ever optimistic, he took his cattle with him to the Barry's Creek station and supplemented his income by fishing.

The fish were sold to the Chinamen who, at that time, were squatting wherever they could find a niche. They smoked the fish and built up something of an export industry, especially in smoked squid.

According to one informant he also grew Boxthorn (for hedges) and Opium Poppy (for the Chinese) and *Digitalis* but it is just possible that these horticultural pursuits were undertaken not on the Promontory but over on his selection at Toora. He took up this selection after he abandoned the Corner Inlet Run.

Had he cultivated them on the Promontory the species would almost certainly be in evidence there today. They are not. However, Boxthorn flourishes in waste places in the Yarram district and the Foxglove (*Digitalis purpurea*) used to be widespread in the Strzelecki Ranges and probably still is. It could well be that the plants are descendants of Baragwanath's stock.

John must have been a man of outstanding character and personality if such qualities can be gauged by the extent of the myths and legends which have grown up around his memory. A little of his personal history will help to show where the myths begin and end.

He came from a family of sail-makers in Hayle in England. One of his grandparents was an apothecary and physician and John, born in 1830, took more than ordinary amount of interest in his grandfather's drugs and his medical pursuits, an interest which he preserved throughout his life.



Early settler's grave at Yanakie.

Photo courtesy Historic Places, Department of Sustainability and Environment, Victoria

When the father died the two boys and their mother migrated to Victoria in 1853. The three of them took part in the gold rushes and found themselves at Talbot (Gippsland) where they became unsuccessful miners. After that adventure they went prospecting and Mrs Baragwanath kept cows to supply milk to the miners, a venture that for them was far more lucrative than mining or prospecting. As a result of some trouble with a squatter over a matter of depasturing their cows on his 'station', John took up the matter with the government of the day and managed to persuade the authorities to establish 'common' which would be available to all.

After this upset, the family came to Melbourne and bought more cows which they ran on the Keilor plains, west of Melbourne, and from there they were taken to Maryborough. In 1865, when the Promontory was thrown open for selection, they moved to the Sealers Cove Run. From here they went to Corner Inlet and finally to the Agnes River selection. Descendants of the



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Baragwanath livestock are still to be seen grazing on the lush pastures of South Gippsland.

John was a man of many parts. His hand-made lathe was a precision instrument which was well known wherever John travelled. He could build a boat or a house as well as the next man and his knowledge of *materia medica* served him often in the out-of-the-way places he chose to live.

Legend has it that he used to work into the early hours of the morn and, to avoid a restless sleep from over-tiredness, he would mix himself a carefully measured concoction of ether and chloroform—a somewhat drastic soporific!

In later life he developed a heart condition and for which he took the digitalis he himself cultivated and extracted. His pharmaceutical pursuits gave rise to a number of legends about him. One was that he operated an illicit still and overlanded the grog across the Promontory or shipped it by sea in the 'Sweet-lined Lily' to the eastern shores where he traded it to passing mariners.

A first thought is that it is an unlikely story. Who would want to buy illicit grog when the real thing was so cheap and available in plenty in most ports? Yet it was a fact that unlicensed stills and grog running were not unknown in those days. A newspaper report of about 1882 records the case of the sale of a half-decked sailing boat. Its new owner docked it for repair and re-fitting and discovered that it housed a still in first-class condition. What caused the owner to abandon it and leave it in the boat was not revealed.

John married Mary Anne Ivey and there were two children—Anne and Lucy. Mary Anne survived her husband by many years and died at the ripe age of 100. Their two children lived on the Promontory until the family moved to Toora.

The elder daughter, Anne, married Mr Chitts, a government contractor who was concerned with the construction of a number of the public works which were undertaken towards the end of the century. Mrs Anne Chitts may be remembered by some people still living by the title she earned — 'the Mother of Northcote', the woman who, as midwife, brought into the world half the population of the growing town of Northcote.

Her sister Lucy was, at the time these notes were first written [1950s], still alive. Then in her late nineties, she was alert enough to recall much of the past.

Mrs Lucy Moor of Welshpool was the aunt of the late William Baragwanath, the one time Victorian Director of Mines and Government Geologist and he was thus the son of John's brother Willy.

One last story of John Baragwanath is worth telling.

On an occasion he was present in company and a member of the group was anxious to ingratiate himself with the rest by referring every now and again to his friend, Mr Barrygoanna. After enduring it for some time John burst out 'For God's sake man, call me Barry' and so it was. They henceforth called him Barry to the satisfaction of all. The South Corner Inlet Run became known as the Barry's Creek Run and the site of his homestead as Barry's Hill. Even a waterhole on Yanakie Isthmus is known as Barry's Waterhole—suggesting that the run most likely extended well to the east from Barry's Hill.

What of the other runs on the Promontory?

Perhaps something of interest could be learned about them were the early official files still available, but some of them have been lost and such sources of information as remain are discoverable mostly by chance.

The 25,000-acre Mount Singapore Run was sold by auction in January 1864 to Mathew Hervey and, during that same year, it passed successively into the hands of four other owners. Four years later it was forfeited to the Crown. A certain Count de Castlemaine acquired it in 1878 but two years afterwards it was again forfeited.

For a reason equally obscure the adjoining 25,000-acre South Corner Inlet Run on Corner Basin remained unoccupied until 1876 when Baragwanath moved across to it from Sealers Cove. Why he first selected Sealers Cove is hard to say. His homestead was built in a locality which was within easy reach of the site of the timber mill that had operated off and on at the Cove since the early 1840s. When he abandoned the Run in 1871 milling was resumed with renewed vigour.

The Oberon Bay Run was taken up by James Fraser while his younger brother David held the Shallow Inlet Run. This latter station apparently extended from Sandy Point to the south and must have been contiguous with the Oberon Bay station in one direction and with Yanakie in another. Possibly it had absorbed the Darby River Run.

Although they were associated with the Promontory for about as long a period as the Baragwanaths, very little legend has grown up around the Frasers. Their sole memorial on the Promontory is Frasers Creek which empties into Oberon Bay about midway along its length.

The two brothers arrived in Melbourne from Scotland in October 1858 when James was aged 22 and David 17.

By this time the first wild enthusiasm of the gold rush days had abated somewhat and the Frasers do not appear to have become involved in it in any way. Gold fever was being steadily displaced by land fever. Whatever may have been their occupation during their

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first few years in the colony it was not until about 1869 that they appeared on the Promontory as landholders.

According to his grandson, Mr C.K. Fraser, David Fraser occupied the Shallow Inlet Run but he has no knowledge of the actual period of his occupancy.

In April 1865 it was purchased by D.S. Warren and held by him until 1869 when it was forfeited and, at the subsequent auction, acquired by George Black. Black held it until about 1870 when it was again auctioned.

This sequence of owners suggests that David Fraser must have taken it up in or after 1870. It is unlikely that he was the occupant prior to Warren because David would have then been under 24 years old—rather young and inexperienced to have undertaken the responsibilities of running a pastoral station. By 1870 he would have gained all the experience he needed.

It is quite probable that the 1869 amendment to the Land Act provided him with the opportunity of becoming a landholder in the district and that he took up the lease of the old Shallow Inlet Run and the southern part of the Yanakie Isthmus at the same time as Baragwanath transferred his interests from Sealers' Cove to Corner Basin.

James Fraser's occupation of the Oberon Bay Run would have been contemporaneous.

The brothers used their holdings merely as cattle runs. By the late 1870s they were among the leading citizens of the Yarram district so evidently they lived in that district and operated their Promontory Runs more or less seasonally. Just how much of the Promontory-Yanakie Isthmus they held between them is hard to say but it could well have been that their joint leases included the old original Yanakie Run, the Shallow Inlet Run and the Oberon Bay Run.

By 1878 Yanakie had absorbed the 15,360-acre Tarwin East Run and the 19,200 acres of the Cape Liptrap Run—an expansion made possible by a further amendment of the Land Act in that year.

Old newspapers give an occasional enlightening mention of the pioneering families of the district but the references are mostly of local and passing interest. For example, it may be noted by those eager for news of events of a bygone era that 'a brother of Messrs James and David Fraser, in March, 1879, during a visit to South Gippsland, drove the first vehicle to "Muddy Creek"—a place now known as Toora. Presumably he drove it from Yarram over a track that was barely negotiable.

At Yarram, in 1881, David is credited with having entered a sweepstake for the best cheese. The report is rather ambiguous but it may be inferred that David was running dairy cows at Yarram at that time and reckoned he could win a sweepstake on the quality of the cheese he produced on the farm.

The settlers of South Gippsland found cheese a useful dairy product. In their day the roads were so bad or even non-existent that there was little to be gained from milk as a commodity. When converted to cheese it was a much more durable foodstuff which could survive the long journey to the Melbourne market. Baragwanath, too, became an expert cheese-maker at his Toora selection. He may have done some experimenting while he was on the Promontory.

In 1883 James Fraser was playing cricket for South Gippsland. He would have been 47 at that time and probably as fit as a fiddle. A couple of years later he was gracing the Vice Presidential chair of the newly formed Yarram Mutual Improvement Association—a cultural organisation which undertook and sponsored debates, recitations, the reading of classics, concerts and the like.

Trivial as these references are, they show that the Frasers were part of the Yarram community during those years. Their interests in the Promontory, if they were still maintained, were not residential at any rate.

Old newspaper reports carry items of historical interest far removed from the main theme of this book but one of them seen by the author seems worth quoting partly because it refers to a character who, among many others, had much to do with one of the various 'developments' to which Wilsons Promontory was to be submitted. It shows, too, that larceny has its funny aspects.

In 1883 Mr A. J. Smith—at the time licensee of the Port Albert Hotel and some 17 or 18 years later the promoter of the Mount Hunter tin mines—caused a man to be charged at the Palmerston Court of Petty Sessions with having purloined nine of his turkeys. The magistrate fined the culprit 25 shillings and made out an order that he keep the turkeys! Doubtless everyone, other than A. J. Smith, was amused.

The growth of Yanakie by absorption of adjoining Runs had its parallel in George Black's acquisitions some years earlier. He seems to have been a land-hungry individual but there is no record of his ever having added Yanakie to his collection. Born in 1813, he was the second son of a famous Captain of the Black Watch and consequently a descendant of the renowned Highland Chieftain, Black Macgregor.

George was firm in the belief that there was 'money in mud' and he made it his business to extract that money from the abundance of mud on the estuary of the Lower Tarwin River. In course of time his pastoral activities became concentrated on the Tarwin. His homestead at Tarwin Meadows is one of Victoria's historic places. Its founder died in 1902.

Agriculturalists hold Black in kind memory for his introduction of strawberry clover into this country. They may also thank him for most of the feral cats that

still roam the countryside. The story goes that from the homestead window he was wont to gaze out on a hillside paddock seething with rabbits—the progeny of a few he had introduced to the district in the early days. His solution to the problem of getting rid of them was, to say the least, unusual. He shipped a boatload of starving cats from Melbourne. They decimated the rabbits in no time. Unfortunately there were either not enough cats or too many rabbits and a sufficient number of each species survived to remain the bane of every generation of landholder in South Gippsland.

In 1862 Black took out a license for the 15,360-acre Tarwin East Run and in 1867 acquired the Cape Liptrap Run from Elliot. In 1869, when Black was adding the Shallow Inlet Run to his domains, McHaffie was acquiring the Yanakie Run from Goldsborough and Parker. He appointed E. M. Millar as his manager. Before the year was out Black had a total of 75,900 acres—the Tarwin East, Shallow Inlet, Toluncon, Tarwin West and Cape Liptrap Runs—but the breaking up process commenced in the following year. Yanakie, too, was caught up in the changing tide of ownership and, as mentioned above, Black relinquished Tarwin East and Cape Liptrap in 1878 and those Runs were added to Yanakie.

McHaffie had large holdings on Phillip Island and King Island but when the Phillip Island Run was reduced to about 500 acres he looked elsewhere for land and chose Yanakie. The annual rental was almost nominal.

When Reoch occupied it in 1862 he paid slightly less than £50 per annum or roughly three farthings per acre per annum. Sixteen years later, when it had expanded to 51,200 acres (80 square miles) by absorption of the Cape Liptrap and Tarwin East Runs, it was rated at £125 per annum. Even at this price—about a halfpenny per acre per annum—it proved unprofitable.

It took a long while for these landholders to absorb the lesson that a few hundred acres of good soil, if well managed, will ensure a better living than thousands of acres of sand. Mud was much more productive as Black was quick to realise.

The Government, too, had been slow to learn but by the mid-eighties it must have reached the conclusion that it could get as much revenue (or more) by allowing forfeiture of the big Runs. At any rate, in 1884 the Land Act was once more amended. The Promontory Runs were abolished in favour of grazing leases. McHaffie must have resigned his interest in Yanakie by this time for his one time manager, Millar, was evidently the holder of the title to the residue which was left after the licensed areas had been resumed—an area of about 13,000 acres. Only a portion of it was retained under pre-emptive rights established by the Land Act of 1869.

During his lifetime Millar had been a familiar figure

on Yanakie and on the Promontory since 1869 when McHaffie took over the Station. Like many a countryman of the times he was a keen naturalist and especially interested in minerals. His managerial duties would have led him into almost every accessible part of the district and during these excursions he generally took the opportunity of searching for specimens for the collections of the scientific gentlemen of the time—particularly minerals, which were duly submitted to the Department of Geological Survey. For example, at the Yanakie Landing he collected small garnets, green and blue sapphires, topaz, zircons and small almandine rubies, all of which had their source in the detritus from the granite which underlies the Tertiary sands present thereabouts. He certainly did not miss the mineral cassiterite from which tin is derived.

R.A.F. Murray, who undertook the geological survey of that part of Gippsland in 1875–76, acknowledged his indebtedness to Millar for much of the information he had gleaned about the mineralogy and topography of the Promontory and for the assistance he had received in the course of his survey.

Writing in 1875 Murray used the term “Old Homestead” in reference to the Yanakie Station, so presumably McHaffie had utilised the new Station headquarters established years earlier by Bennison—a site which had become known as the “New Homestead”. It was some seven or eight miles to the north of the old place. It became the centre of activities of the pastoralists of a new generation and is, of course, now absorbed into the lively community of Yanakie, the last township on the way through to Tidal River from Foster or Fish Creek.

When the Soldiers’ Settlement Commission was preparing Yanakie for settlement in 1952 the homestead building was demolished, despite objections by a number of the local folk who had come to regard it as the epitome of the history of settlement in that part of the State.

In its time it was a stately home with teak and mahogany fittings, embellished with relics of the many wrecks which had occurred of the Promontory.

The original homestead of Bennison’s day was a much more modest building which was situated somewhere in the vicinity of an area which, in the early 1940s, was selected as the site of the Yanakie aerodrome. The nearby lagoon now known as Cotter’s Lake or Cotter’s Lagoon used to be known as the Homestead Lagoon.

The unpredictability of the predilections of man are well enough illustrated in the birth and decay of his communities. Yanakie township was expected to grow up on the west shore of Corner Basin at the place known as Townsend’s Point (a place not to be confused





Andersons hut at Shallow Inlet, c.1910.

Photo courtesy Historic Places, Department of Sustainability and Environment, Victoria

with Townsend's Point on the south coast of Latrobe Island, close to the actual entrance to the Basin).

The township was duly surveyed but as it was never officially proclaimed, no land auction was ever held. The place gradually became a quiet nook for holiday makers who preferred a measure of seclusion.

The place used to be the haunt of amateur fishermen, one or two of whom had gone to the trouble of defacing the charm of the place with shacks and cabins which they built for their private use on this public reserve.

The Yanakie Landing is one of the few places in Victoria where grows the rare plant called the Crimson Berry, *Cyathodes juniperina*. It belongs to the Epacrid family of plants which includes the State's floral emblem—Pink Heath (*Epacris impressa*). As well as being a somewhat rare plant, Crimson Berry has the distinction of being one which links the flora of Victoria with that of Tasmania. Several species of *Cyathodes* occur in the island State but in Victoria only one of them has survived the subsidence of the Bunurong Range which once linked the two land masses.

At Townsend's Point the Crimson Berry grows to the stature of a small tree, sometimes nearly twelve feet high. Small shrubby specimens are to be

seen within a few feet of the water's edge where, in summer time and early autumn, their profusion of crimson berries makes them an object of delight to those who have eyes for the beauty of such gems of the bush and seashore. On the recommendation of local naturalists the South Gippsland Shire Council has established a reserve to protect and preserve these rare plants and, provided the Council can get the cooperation of visitors to the reserve, they would be safe for a long time to come unless someone with a bulldozer is let loose in the reserve.

When Yanakie was eventually established it developed around the "New Homestead" which was about two and a half miles to the west of Townsend's Point.

Millar's Hut, once a landmark to travellers on their way to the Lighthouse by the overland route, was one of the outlying buildings of the "Old Homestead" and it was built close to the pack track which led to the Yanakie Landing on the shore of Corner Basin. The hut has long since vanished but it was situated about midway along what is now the north boundary of the Yanakie Aerodrome reserve. The 'drome occupies part of the block once held in the name of Maria Falls for the Falls brothers who became its owner in 1892 at the time of the final subdivision of the Yanakie Run.

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In 1887 the Government proposed to alienate the whole of the Promontory to settlement. There were plenty of applicants for the proposed holdings but a deputation from the Field Naturalists' Club, led by a number of prominent and influential citizens, persuaded the Minister of Lands to abandon the idea.

Despite this apparent concurrence with public opinion it was not long before three brothers named Matthew, Alexander and James Watson applied for a special survey of Refuge Cove under the terms of the 1884 Lands Act for "residence and gardening".

The area was duly surveyed by George Hastings and each man applied for a two acre block. Since the brothers were fishermen by calling it is highly improbable that they had any serious intentions about establishing gardens at Refuge Cove. Luckily, their application was refused.

In the following year Hastings was commissioned by the Government to survey and lay out the new township of Foster which was growing apace on the old settlement of Stockyard Creek.

This was the era of development in South Gippsland. Many Government townships were surveyed and several were even proclaimed—places such as Bowen, Liverpool, Palmerston, Yanakie and Seaforth. Others never were proclaimed. Some that were proclaimed were never settled as townships and their proclamations were rescinded.

The Government must have been optimistic about

the possibilities of settlement on the Promontory. For years E.C. Mason, MLA and member for the district in the 1880s (and eventually Speaker of the Legislative Assembly) had urged the building of a railway through to Port Albert and Yarram.

When Parliament finally agreed to the proposal, land values down that way rose meteorically. In May 1886, 163 blocks in the "township" of Liverpool, on the Franklin River, were put up for sale at a starting price of £200 per acre.

The press advertisement advised that when the Great Southern line came to operate "all passengers by rail for Mount Singapore and Wilson's Promontory will embark at Liverpool in a steamer to cross the Inlet".

Fate decided otherwise. As mentioned later, the Freemans bought most of Liverpool and no big township arose among the forest of Banksia, Tea-tree and Honey-myrtle. The railway siding of Bennison was the only structure of any permanence to recall past dreams of a glorious future.

Although the Government had dropped its more ambitious settlement scheme it still toyed with the idea of "opening up" the Promontory.

In fact in July 1889 a township at Mount Singapore was actually proclaimed. This meant that one had to be laid out and, in due course, Alexander Black was sent to undertake the task.

## Chapter 3: The Township of Seaforth, and Tin Mining

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Alexander Black was the man who surveyed the 110 mile Black–Allen border line between Victoria and New South Wales, from the Indi River to Cape Howe, in 1871–2. He was not only a very experienced surveyor but a seasoned bushman as well—one who would hardly be daunted by the morasses and swamps nor the sand dunes of the Singapore Peninsula.

The Prom's Singapore Peninsula has an interesting history which stemmed from the developments taking place on the mainland shores of the Inlet and from various activities on the Promontory itself—activities such as sealing, logging and milling, lighthouse construction, coast and geological surveying, prospecting, fishing, cattle grazing, dingo trapping, hunting of koalas and wallabies and other sporting proclivities.

In the course of time the Peninsula became what must have been something like the distributing centre for the needs of those who for one reason or another, roamed the Promontory.

Entrance Point, on its north-eastern shore, provided a good landing for boats from the mainland, just across the water. A nearby spring furnished a constant water supply to supplement any deficiencies of rain water catchment and Mount Singapore and its contiguous hills gave protection from the boisterous gales which were apt to lash the ocean coast.

Biddy had selected the place as a site for her camp, so presumably others were already camped there when she arrived. It was well situated as the point for despatch of scalps, skins and furs—the trade of the dingo trapper and hunter. Dingoes were plentiful on the Promontory and provided a source of steady income to both trappers and shooters up to the last decade of the century.

During the 1860s and 1870s scarcely a square mile of the Colony escaped inspection by prospectors. Their prime interest was gold but other metals, ores and minerals were sought and the Promontory had its share of the invaders.

The gold rush era had attracted numbers of Chinese to the Colony and many of them crossed to the Promontory to join the hopeful gold seekers. Like their European counterparts, they found no gold but their sojourn is commemorated by several place names on Singapore Peninsula. On the east coast are Johnny Souey's Cove and Beach, and on the west coast one will note Chinaman's Bay, Bend, Creek, Knob, and Beach and Chinaman's Long Beach.

Some Chinese people remained to eke out a livelihood as station hands and fishermen. By them was founded the squid fishing industry in those parts. Squid was esteemed a delicacy in China and the dried

cephalopod provided an export trade profitable enough to enable the industry to continue for some years. The disappearance of the Chinese from the scene probably coincided with the outbursts of popular feeling against them which developed in the latter years of the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

During the period of the geological survey of South Gippsland by Murray the Promontory had been included in the area examined by him. Apart from his observations on its general geology and his mention of the mineral collection of Mr Millar of Yanakie Station, the only reference in his report to its potential mineral wealth was to the existence of stream tin.

In the following years tin prospecting contracted towards the Singapore Peninsula and finally Mount Hunter became the focal point of all the mining operations that followed. It also became the hunter's playground, his happy hunting ground in a land of the free and easy far from the restraining influences of more organised communities. Even up to the 1950s the Peninsula and other places in the Park away from the watchful eye of the Park ranger were favoured preserves of some 'sportsmen' who, without much constraint, hunted rabbits, foxes, deer, emus and wallabies.

The regular fishing industry also made its contribution to the genesis of planned settlement on the Peninsula. Due to a variety of circumstances fishing has always been a struggling industry in Victoria and, over the years, many plans for its stabilisation have been devised.

One which especially affected the destiny of the Promontory will be discussed in another chapter. For the present it need only be mentioned that the fishermen on this part of the Victorian coast were based mainly on Toora and Welshpool. Shelter Cove was a haven for those who made the Inlet in time of trouble.

During their periods of slackness or relaxation they too would join the throng around Mount Singapore, Biddy's Camp and Mount Hunter. The settlement scheme which the Government was considering in 1887 envisaged the laying out of townships at suitable sites along the coast of the Promontory and Corner Basin. For reasons to be discussed later, the scheme was abandoned, but not in its entirety.

On 5th July 1889 the Victoria Gazette carried a Proclamation, dated 1st July, made under the Land Act of 1884. The gist of it read as follows:

"His Excellency Sir William Cleaver Francis Robinson, KCMG .....the Administrator of the Government of Victoria .....does by this notice now proclaim as townships the portions of Crown lands hereinafter described, that is to say, –  
Township at Mount Singapore, Wilson's Promontory,



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County of Buln Buln, Parish of Yanakie: bounded on the south by a line running from east to west and distant about one mile and a half south from the summit of Mount Hunter, and on the west, north and east by the shore of Corner Inlet.”

The division of the Promontory into its four parishes probably took place during the survey in 1842–3 by Thomas Nutt. Thereafter Warreen was used when any reference in official documents was made to the parish in relation to any proposals for a survey, one of which, of course, involved the township at Mount Singapore.

As a consequence of the Proclamation at least two township sites were surveyed—Yanakie, at Townsend’s Point, and Seaforth at Mount Singapore. The latter was the only site with any semblance of a more or less resident population and, when the clamour against the Promontory settlement scheme had abated, Black was sent to make the survey. Seaforth was situated near Freshwater Cove, about a mile south of Mount Singapore. Its streets were all named—Hunter, Latrobe, Leonard, Mason and Singapore Streets and The Esplanade among them.

Singapore Street ran from south to north in line with Mount Singapore. The more easterly Hunter Street was parallel with it but lay in line with Mount Hunter. Mason Street was named after E. C. Mason MA and one-time Speaker of the House of Representatives who had represented the Yarram district for a number of years—from 1881 to about 1885. He had fought hard for the construction of the Great Southern Railway and when he retired from politics a grateful electorate presented him with a purse of four hundred sovereigns.

A sketch map shows the general layout as designed by Black. The original is Plan W.384 B.1, dated July 1895. It shows Section A of the whole township and the Section included 316 rectangular blocks.

In June 1892 the residential sites were put up for auction and fifteen of them were actually sold. Most of them were quarter-acre blocks and, together, they brought about £300 which, all things considered, was a pretty good price in those days—between £15 and £23 a block.

W Gaunson (Commissioner of Lands?) invested heavily by purchasing nine blocks—46, 47, 56, 90, 101, 102, 103, 105 and 106. Block 90 cost him £40. H. Cumberland bought Lot 43 for £22 which was about the average price. G.A. Grant acquired Lot 94, C. Curtin Lot 107, J. Whyte Lot 88, T. Hooper Lot 57 and E. S. Raphael Lot 50.

The three last mentioned proved to be what might well be called ‘stumbling blocks’ in later years when the Committee of Management of the National Park planned to take over control of Seaforth. The owners could not be located and hence the titles could not be transferred without long enquiry and search for the owners.

As none of the investors of 1892 had made any effort to use the properties the Government was persuaded to attempt to resume the land and, in 1910, the Minister for Lands approved the acquisition by purchase.

All but three of the owners or their agents or executors were glad enough to get rid of their holdings for a total £460. The three who could not be located caused a considerable delay in concluding the transaction. The executors of Raphael’s estate eventually yielded up Lot 50 but the title holders of Lots 57 and 88 were never found.

Little now remains to show that Seaforth ever existed except, possibly, a memory conveyed by the name “Pub Hump”—the rise above Chinaman’s Beach where once stood George Smith’s hotel. Yes. The Promontory once had an hotel. It was a modest affair, lacking the kind of amenity now considered so necessary for the modern visitor to the Promontory—no Royal Suite, no Conference Room, probably no bath in every room but it did have a bar and that was what kept the place going for some time.

The hotel was built on what was to be called The Esplanade. Smith hoped to purchase the freehold of the block on which he had built his pub but was apparently outbid. Thus he was obliged to move the building and so it was transferred in its entirety to Port Welshpool to serve as a store conducted by Mrs Ellis, one of Smith’s daughters.

The historic old building in much modified form still exists and may be seen at Port Welshpool, where for years it was used as a post office and the residence of the post mistress.

Another memorial to Seaforth is the stone cairn on the summit of Mount Singapore. The cairn was erected by Black’s survey party in 1890 or 1891. Although it is a quite imposing structure it is now little known and rarely visited mainly because of the present difficulty of access to the summit of the mount.

The dissolution of a township can be a long drawn-out affair, as might be gathered from another Proclamation made 63 years after the one which brought Seaforth into existence. It is quoted from the Government Gazette of 24th September 1953.(page 5438) under the heading:

Land Act, 1928 – Township at Mount Singapore Rescinded.

“...(By the authority of) Section 25 of the Land Act, 1928 do this my Proclamation rescind the Proclamation dated 1st July, 1889 defining certain areas of land as townships insofar as it refers to the Township at Mount Singapore, Wilson’s Promontory, County of Buln Buln, Parish of Yanakie ....(etc., as described in the 1889 Proclamation)

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Given under my Hand and Seal (etc.) 16th September, 1952.

Dallas Brooks.

A.E. Lind, Commissioner of Crown Lands and Survey.

Thus was Seaforth erased from the map!

## Tin Mining on Mount Hunter

On Mount Hunter, about 3 or 4 km south of Seaforth, tin mining became the preoccupation of a number of the more enthusiastic or optimistic prospectors.

Several leases were allotted and a succession of licensees operated them up to about 1926 when all leases and the appertaining licences were withdrawn.

The Mount Hunter venture, during its heyday, had a number of supporters, none more enterprising than Mr Bill Smith – a well known identity of Port Welshpool. As well as investing in the business he made valiant efforts to promote public interest in it. His boat was used to ferry prospective investors across to the workings where they could see for themselves where the fortunes of the future lay.

Although Bill was related to George Smith the one-time proprietor of the “Seaforth” Hotel, he seems to have failed to recognise that, as an investment, hotel businesses might be more lucrative than tin mines on Mount Hunter. However, by 1914, things looked fairly bright and Smith brought into commission the “Janet Iles”, a boat well known to many visitors to the mines and, in later years, to tourists who wanted to explore the Promontory’s east coast. It is now a museum piece on display next to the Port Welshpool Historical Museum.

The prospectors, during the first years of the geological survey of Victoria, had located small quantities of stream tin in the Tertiary gravels at a number of places on the Promontory and in adjacent localities. According to Murray, a hundredweight of ore had been sluiced from the beds of tributaries of the Franklin River in the early 1870s. The ore was considered to have originated in the Palaeozoic granites and Silurian deposits during the period of erosion of the gap between Wilsons Promontory and the mainland ranges where those rocks are exposed. This surmise seemed to be substantiated by the discoveries of Mr Millar of Yanakie Station in the 1870s. He had washed small quantities of cassiterite (a tin ore) from the debris which overlies the granite in the vicinity of the Yanakie Landing although the prospectors who had combed the western side of the Promontory had failed to obtain anything worthwhile.

Competent opinion was inclining to the opinion that if tin was to be discovered there at all in payable quantity it would be located in lodes or veins in the

eastern or central parts. Mount Singapore was duly prospected—and two quartz lodes varying in thickness from six inches to two feet were encountered, but they yielded no metal.

Many years later, when the price of tin had risen appreciably, prospectors had another try and, in 1902, tin was found in a gully running east from a saddle of hills about one mile inland from Chinaman’s Bay—somewhere between Mount Singapore and Mount Hunter.

A cut of about 50 feet yielded 40 pounds of ore. The lucky prospector is believed to have been a man named Lawson. At any rate, the stream in this particular gully came to be known as Lawson’s Creek. In a tributary to the creek, called Grey Tin Gully, the ore occurred in a wash which varied in depth from a few inches to about a foot. It rested on a granite bottom at a depth of two or three feet.

As a result of the work of the pioneer prospectors a mining lease was secured and serious efforts were made to work it. In 1905 E J Dunn, the then Director of the Victorian Geological Survey, visited the mine and reported that, since tin ore was at the time, worth £165 a ton, the leased area was likely to yield a quite payable amount of tin. All that was required was to find the source of the wash and to determine its direction and extent. This the miners proceeded to do.

Early in 1919 J P Kenny, Assistant Field Geologist, gave a brief report on the activities of Richardson’s team, which was then working one of the leases.

The party claimed to have located the source of the ore in a high level run which crossed a wide saddle at 700 feet above sea level for a width of nine chains and a length of fifteen chains. If Lawson’s cut was to be any guide, a small fortune in tin lay in this run. Kenny considered that the tin already found could have been washed down from this area into the gullies which emptied into a flat of some 1000 acres in extent on the east side of Mount Hunter.

This flat is an especially interesting area from quite another point of view. It is completely surrounded by a morass which has protected it from invasion by fire as well as from any large-scale invasion by man. It may very well represent a relic of plant and animal associations long since gone from the rest of the Peninsula. It is thought to have been formed by drift sand and has a maximum elevation of about ten feet above high water mark.

The bedrock of granite dips under the morass at a slope of from ten to 25 degrees and it seemed likely that the ore might have accumulated between the granite and the drift sand over the whole area. As the cost of recovery from such a situation, where the depth of overburden was quite unknown, would have been



Sluicing at Mt Hunter tin mine, Wilsons Promontory NP, 1924. There is now little trace of tin mining operations. Photo courtesy Historic Places, Department of Sustainability and Environment, Victoria

uneconomic, no steps were taken to remove the sand. If tin ore did indeed lie beneath this thousand acres of drift sand one may suppose that it is still there—well protected by the morass.

It should be noted that, by this time, the greater part of the Promontory had been reserved as a National Park but the tin mines were situated in a section of the Promontory which was then actually excluded from the Park. The Proclamation of 1889, referred to in another chapter, had the effect of setting aside about twelve square miles of the Singapore Peninsula for other public purposes—a site for the “township at Mount Singapore” and for the industrial developments which were anticipated from the tin prospecting. Consequently this sector remained under the control of the Lands Department although, when tin mining began to fade away, the general oversight of the area was delegated to the Committee of Management of the National Park—a delegation they would have welcomed with modified joy had they been able to anticipate the trouble they were to be put to in controlling the place.

The shortage of tin during the First World War gave some stimulus to the industry and it was because of the moderate success of the Mount Hunter venture that the Government was almost persuaded to throw open



the National Park to prospectors. It had been forgotten, surely, that the Promontory had been pretty thoroughly prospected years before.

Under the National Parks Act of today miners have no special rights in National Parks and such a threat would have no substance unless Parliament were to decide otherwise.

National Parks appear to be peculiarly susceptible to the exigencies of war. Older members of the present community will probably recall how tin plate almost vanished from circulation in 1917. Many of the foodstuffs commonly sold in tins began to appear in cardboard containers. Tin plate was in decidedly short supply. It was considered desirable that the Commonwealth’s own resource of tin ore should be fully exploited and Wilsons Promontory was one of the places in Victoria where tin was known to occur. What was there must be won. The whole of the Park was to be thoroughly combed.

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Such was the threat to its integrity in 1918.

The Committee of Management envisaged hordes of prospectors pegging out claims in every likely as well as unlikely place, sluicing operations wrecking every crystal stream, the beauty of this wonderland of nature vanishing under the onslaught of miners' picks and crashing rock. It was too much.

With the support of the Field Naturalists' Club, the Australian Natives' Association and other bodies the Committee arranged a deputation which persuaded the Minister for Mines and the Minister for Lands to have the project abandoned.

The deputation was introduced by the Speaker of the House, the Hon. John Mackey who, as Minister for Lands in an earlier Government, had been responsible for having the Promontory permanently reserved as a National Park.

Although further licences to prospect in the Park were refused, the licences to work the existing leases at Mount Hunter remained in force because the twelve square miles of reserve on Singapore Peninsula was not actually a part of the Park reserve, although under the nominal control of the Committee of Management of the Park.

In the light of the knowledge now available and of the experience gained in working the Mount Hunter leases, it is just as well that the Government's scheme was carried no further because, in the words of one of our foremost geologists, "the Mount Hunter operations provided more experience than tin."

With some optimism the miners persisted, but their major efforts were confined to the Lawson's Creek areas where several shafts and tunnels were excavated. Of the eight shafts sunk up to 1919 two, known respectively as Hotstone's and Potter's (after the men who had sunk them), were still being worked at the time of Kenny's visit.

Hotstone's "bottomed" at about 20 feet. The others varied in depth from 10 to 20 feet but apparently failed to yield any ore. The only worthwhile recovery came from Hotstone's shaft and from two tunnels called "Richardson's" and "Blakeley's". Kenny, in fact, believed that the best prospects lay in the washings from pot holes. The miners took the hint and, with the money raised from the investors, installed a mighty pumping system which pumped sea water from Chinaman's Bay to the 700-foot level up on the Mount.

A relic on the tumbled rocks near the water's edge at the south end of Chinaman's Beach must have puzzled many of those who have paused to fish nearby. There are to be seen several large concrete blocks to which once were anchored the machinery which pumped the sea water up and around the scarp of the hill to another

relay pump which lifted the water to the level of the sluicing area. The pumps and pipes were removed long ago. All that now remains are the blocks which have defied the weather for more than 60 years.

Blakeley was a relative of a one-time Senator in the Commonwealth Parliament while Richardson, as well as being a well-known trade union organiser, became a Councillor of the municipality of Oakleigh. He was a Creole and reputedly a most colourful character.

As late as 1925 the miners were still working their leases. W. H. Ferguson, Field Geologist of the Victorian Geological Survey, inspected the site early in that year and noted that ore was still being won—some from tunnels and shafts and some from sluicing. Six thousand cubic yards had been excavated in two parts of the wash in the sluiced area and more than three hundredweight of ore had been obtained. Continuation of such yield must have been promising enough to the Mount Hunter Tin Mining Company—the syndicate at that time holding the lease—to warrant the belief that a long life for the more lay ahead.

The company's manager, Malcolm Kirwan, who succeeded the earlier manager Sinclair, established himself in a cottage at Chinaman's Bay to the south of the 500-ft high sand dune which formed a kind of spur to the saddle between Biddy's Camp and Corner Inlet. The precise location of the cottage would be difficult to find now but some guide to the spot might be the presence of a greater than usual number of introduced plant species. They would be in their greatest concentration at such a place.

The pot holes must have failed to fulfil expectations. The venture quietly faded and slowly the scars began to heal. Bushfires have since hastened the effacement of buildings and other mining structures until, today, about all that remains are the sites of the shafts and tunnels and some rusting iron machinery.

The Park Committee experienced considerable trouble over the excavations. The Company, under pressure from the Mines Department, made some pretence at filling the holes—mostly by covering them with wooden slabs over which was spread a few inches of soil. Luckily the Park rangers discovered this dangerous device and duly reported the matter. Although the Mines Department was asked to take action to have the hazards removed the culprits seem to have vanished. A few holes were filled in at the expense of the Department but it fell to the lot of the rangers to render the area safe.

Finis was written to the Mount Hunter tin mines in 1926 when the three leases then current, and their operative licences, were declared void.





## Chapter 4: Botanical Exploration, the Lighthouse and Skye Crofters

**A**s already indicated, there was plenty of activity on the Promontory during the years immediately before and after the middle of the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

One visit of some significance to those interested in its natural history was that of Ferdinand Mueller—explorer, geographer and the first Government Botanist of the Colony of Victoria. In the autumn of 1853 he was nearing the end of his long and arduous exploration of the Australian Alps and, on the homeward journey, he made what might be termed a detour which brought him to the east coast of the Promontory, where he spent some time collecting botanical material. It was on this occasion, near Sealers Cove, that he spent a miserable four days with little food, drenched by incessant rain and, by unhappy chance, reduced to his last match.

In his report of September of that year to the Colonial Secretary which was duly tabled in Parliament and printed, mention of this visit is made in one what for Mueller is an unusually terse sentence: “After several weeks’ travelling in the neighbourhood of Port Albert and many excursions through Wilson’s Promontory, I quitted Gipps Land, returning homeward along the coast.” The full written account of the whole journey was contained in despatches written en route and addressed to the Colonial Secretary but such accounts as are now readily accessible derive from references in papers and journals which appeared in the years that followed.

Mueller was certainly impressed with the richness and variety of the vegetation he noted at Sealers Cove, so much so that in the following year, he despatched John Walters, foreman of the Botanic Garden, to the cove to collect specimens for the Paris Exhibition.

Two years later Walters was once again on the Promontory “to obtain, on a large scale, ferns and young plants of the indigenous evergreen beech, ... of the native Sassafras ... and other trees and shrubs of the locality, either rare, useful or ornamental.” Thus wrote Mueller in his report of August 1857. He added—“Through the aid kindly offered by the owners of the sawmill at Sealers Cove he [Walters] has been enabled to secure, besides a collection of timber specimens, a large number of young plants of forest trees not only as valuable acquisitions to our Garden but, also, for mutual interchange with similar institutions.”

This statement seems to place the resumption of milling at Sealers Cove at some date prior to his visit in 1853.

The mill’s logging tracks are said to have penetrated for a distance of some three miles to the gullies at the foot of Mount Ramsay. Thirty years later little trace of the mill remained.

Before the 1840s, and to a lesser extent during the

1850s, Sealers Cove and its adjacent forests must have been supremely lovely to behold. The forests have been described as “park-like”, a description which might well have applied to those of the lower slopes of the mountains, but the type of vegetation in the gullies would have more nearly resembled what we call “jungles” with tall straight beeches, sassafras, blackwoods and lilly-pillies, festooned with lianes and epiphytic ferns, overshadowing musk, blanket-leaf and tree fern, all with their foliage so densely spread as to reduce the penetration of sunlight to a point at which few herbs and shrubs can survive; where ferns, fungi and mosses are about the only impedances to easy walking; where the winds move only in the treetops above; where the temperature varies little from day to day and from season to season—delightfully cool places on the hottest of summer days.

Except in a very few isolated pockets no trace of such forests and jungles now remains. They have been destroyed by a succession of bushfires, and in their place have arisen forests of stunted and fire-scarred trees which shelter an almost impenetrable “scrub” of undergrowth—a sequence which has been not at all unusual in the burned-out mountain forests of Victoria.

Lilly Pilly Gully, the haunt of earlier generation of visitors to the Park, was just such a “jungle”. Its loveliness was destroyed by fire and hurricane in 1943.

For some years the old familiar foot-track to it was closed to visitors so that natural regeneration could proceed unhindered by the disturbances caused by trampling feet.

The complete restoration by natural processes of an area ravaged in this way takes a long while although Nature is quick to heal the superficial scars of axe, fire or tempest by clothing them with a mantle of green foliage. However, given freedom from fire, one may expect the present widespread tangle of undergrowth to endure for no more than a generation or so. In time there will gradually emerge once more a clean, park-like forest of straight-boled trees of the stature of those which graced the slopes and valleys more than one hundred years ago.

Is it too much to hope that fire can be outlawed for so long? For the present, although the scenery of the Promontory may have changed, its foundation of rugged mountains remains impregnable.

The timber mill operating at Sealers Cove in 1856 no doubt left its mark in broken forest giants, scoured wagon tracks and all those things that go with logging and milling, and it may be concluded that the mill ceased to operate only when accessible and utilisable timber had ‘cut out’.

Thirty or forty years passed before regeneration provided more timber of merchantable size, quality and

quantity. At the end of these decades milling, in fact, was resumed.

At Sealers Cove the millers laid down tram tracks which reached across the rugged country towards Refuge Cove and deep into the valleys of Mount Ramsay and the Wilson Range, extending even as far as eastern slopes of Mount Oberon. The now vanished jetty, once a feature of the cove, was rebuilt by them.

A story is told about a large stack of blackwood logs near the jetty, awaiting shipment to the mainland. The milling rights expressly excluded blackwood but the manager of the mill, operating so far from the purview of officialdom, considered the risks of breaking the agreement worthwhile. Fate was against him. A Departmental officer chanced to visit the scene, saw the huge dump of logs and promptly ordered the lot to be burned!

A few years after the dedication of the Promontory as a site for a National Park the mill ceased to operate and the timber tracks were, once more, abandoned.

Specially favourable circumstances are in the high summer rainfall of the Sealers Cove area and its remarkably sheltered situation.

In 1928 a party of bushwalkers from the Field Naturalists' Club and the Melbourne Walking Club found traces of one of the old timber tracks. They followed it with difficulty to the foot of Mount Wilson and located the site of the mill which had operated there almost a quarter of a century earlier. There, also, were found the remains of the timbermen's huts, some derelict machinery and relics of the loading stage.

How much of it all now remains, after the passing of more than 80 years?

But to return to the botanical collectors of that era. One, M.C. Wilhelmi, was there in either 1859 or 1860. He is known to have collected in the Corner Basin area and to have been on Citadel Island—one of the Glennie Group which lies off Oberon Bay. Another botanist, believed to have been Carl Walter, collecting for Mueller, came in 1869 but, unfortunately, neither left anything in the way of a published record of his travels which could shed light on the contemporary scene.

There are only occasional references which speak of "park-like" forests on the eastern side of the ranges, lush river flats and heavily timbered valleys as the normal environment of Wilsons Promontory.

In 1874 Mueller once again visited the region, this time by boat to the Lighthouse from whence he examined the country in the vicinity of Mount Oberon and the telegraph line.

With him were W. H. Tietkins and Carl Walter, the former, under Mueller's tutelage, undergoing a course of training in botanical collecting in anticipation of the



Mr Audas of the Field Naturalists Club of Victoria examines a grass-tree during an excursion to Wilsons Promontory, 1905. Photo courtesy Historic Places, Department of Sustainability and Environment, Victoria

task he was to undertake in the following year when he was to accompany Ernest Giles on his memorable expedition through Central Australia to Perth.

Again no record has been located of what was actually collected on that occasion, although one may be sure that the indefatigable botanist added to the tally of plants new for the State.

The vegetation of a region is of never-ending interest to those who study ecology and, although far from pretending to be one of them, the present writer [Ros. Garnet] thought it worthwhile to gather together as much information as has been available about the plants that have been found on the Promontory. It was duly assembled and published in 1971 under the title *The Wildflowers of Wilsons Promontory National Park*. It may be added that the book was conceived as a chapter in this present work but it seemed a pity to deny visitors to the Park such information as had been assembled to some indefinite time in the future when this present book might be published.

## The Lighthouse

In 1859 the lighthouse on South East Point, almost at the extreme south of the Promontory, was put into operation.

It was built of very fine-grained grey granite which happened to be present at the site in a thick, horizontally-bedded band between strata of the much coarser stone. The quarry was located below the lighthouse.

The circular stone tower of the edifice is 19.5 metres high and its pinnacle 84 metres above sea level. Its light flashes every 15 seconds and is visible at a distance of 42 kilometres.

For those who like to have such details at hand it may

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be added that its precise location is given as longitude 146° 25' East and latitude 39° 08' South, giving it the distinction of being the southernmost building on the Australian continent. The actual southernmost part on the continent is South Point—about 4.8 km west and south as the crow flies.

There is something fascinating about lighthouses and the Promontory lighthouse has been a veritable magnet to visitors. It is permanently manned by a team of officers and their families whose only personal contact with the outside world was when the lighthouse supply ship *Lady Loch* called or when a telegraph lineman or a walker from the Darby River arrived. Such visitors were always welcome.

Officially the lighthouse is out of bounds to unauthorised visitors but the Commonwealth, which owns the 73 acre (29.63 ha) reserve on which it stands has, naturally, never objected to the small community there enjoying such social contacts as chance provided. Even in this present era of 4WD vehicles access to it by land is limited.

Although many present-day visitors to the Park would welcome a public motor road through to the lighthouse it is improbable that one for public use will ever be constructed at the direction of the National Parks Service. Such a road would be extremely costly and it would fail to provide the motorist with what he would most want—freedom to visit and inspect the lighthouse. If the place were to become a tourist rendezvous one can be certain that the Commonwealth authorities would insist on the property being rigidly closed to unauthorised visitors. Cars would have to stop at a point half a mile north of the lighthouse—at the boundary of the reserve.

Because there is now a 4WD track leading to it the lighthouse keepers are no longer isolated from social contact. The arrival of an overland visitor is of little more interest to them than the meeting with strangers in a city street.

At the time of its establishment the staff lived on what was indeed a lonely outpost. Signals to passing ships would have been their only means of contact. However, almost immediately, erection of the overland telegraph was commenced and, in the following year (1860), the lighthouse was linked to Melbourne by a line from Foster via Yanakie, the Darby River and Mount Oberon. The job was carried out under contract to the Ports and Harbours Branch of the Victorian Customs Department and its route became, for most of its length, the track to the lighthouse.

One of the sub-contractors for the Promontory section of the line was a local character, Bob Curran by name. He, with the help of his two young sons, completed the job under some difficulty.

Packhorses were used to carry the rolls of wire and the constant jolting over the granite boulders chafed the straps which held them in place. On several occasions the rolls cut themselves free and went bounding down the mountain side like sturdy hoops, leaping and crashing until they landed in the ocean far below where they probably remain to this day.

Curran himself was injured by a pole which rolled on his leg. In the absence of medical aid of any sort he set about curing the injury by immersing his leg in the sea. Despite the prolonged salt water treatment he continued to suffer from the accident and it seems to have given him more trouble than usual on the occasion of the visit of the Bishop of Sale to the Alberton district. After the service old Curran emerged from the church and retired to a nearby log where he sat alone in his misery until the Bishop joined him to enquire after his health. Curran explained his conversational style by mentioning his regret that “the swears will slip out” and went on to say that “me bloody leg is bothering me and now the other bastard has let me down”. The Bishop hastened away, murmuring “Too bad, too bad my poor fellow.”

For the benefit of the telegraph linemen a hut was built along the route, at Titania Creek. A test house was erected at the Darby River in a small allotment which was temporarily reserved in 1892 for the use of the Post and Telegraph Department. It was “temporarily” reserved for something like 26 years and then finally, around 1918, reserved permanently as part of the National Park. In the intervening years the State Department had gone out of existence, its functions having been taken over by the Commonwealth PMG’s Department.

The line maintenance men had no further use for the hut or for the small reserve. Both huts gradually became derelict and one of them finally disappeared. While they stood and remained habitable they were often used by the walking fraternity as they made their way from Yanakie (and later, the Darby River) to the lighthouse.

The track they followed varies little from that now in use. After fording the Darby it skirted Darby Hill on the east and climbed the saddle of the Leonard Range, descended into the valley of Whisky Creek and then on to Tidal River.

From here it wound its way across the Oberon Saddle between Oberon and the Wilson Range from whence were to be seen lovely vistas of Oberon Bay, the ocean and little islands dotted here and there. It then made its way down to Growler’s Creek, then south easterly for a couple of mile to Martin’s Hill; southward for another mile to the pass between Adam and Eve and Mother Siegel after crossing which it turned easterly through



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the well timbered area of Roaring Meg, Picnic, Ferres and First Bridge Creeks (three of them spanned by very rustic bridges); skirted South Peak and dropped steeply down to the boundary of the lighthouse reserve.

Between Growler's Creek crossing and Martin's Hill another track went west through some sand hummocks to a pleasant camping spot on Oberon Bay near the mouth of Fraser's Creek. By following this track north along the general direction of the coast the traveller emerged onto the slopes near the mouth of Growler's Creek and could make his way to Tidal River by the route which, today, is one of the favoured walks of those who visit the national park.

The telegraph line is no longer used, radio communication having superseded it, but back in 1860 it represented one of the great advances in scientific achievement. Morse's electric telegraph was a novelty which had come into use only a few years earlier and the Victorian government was among the first to use the system for long distance communication.

Although the Commonwealth had no further use for the old Darby River reserve, the 73-acre reserve at South East Point was taken over and, in more recent years, another area on the summit of Mount Oberon was acquired in exchange for the site at the Darby. Here has been built a radio-telephone relay station to facilitate interstate communication with Tasmania and the islands of Bass Strait and the southern Ocean. The road leading to it is open to private vehicles as far as the turntable some distance from the top but the actual summit of one of the Park's high mountains—a peak renowned for its unexcelled vistas—is denied to all but those who are capable of hill climbing.

However, walkers are well rewarded for the effort of following the rest of the well-graded road to its terminus at the top. The panoramas which they will see spread before them are magnificent. As Gregory once remarked: "He who has stood on the top of Mount Oberon...and watched the clouds gather...and disperse about Mount Wilson...has enjoyed a sight not easily surpassed."

The lighthouse track is part of the story of Wilsons Promontory. But the origin of another favourite tourist track (or what is known of it)—the bridle path to Sealers Cove—is worth recording.

There is good reason to believe that it was first cut by a government survey party when the Promontory was being surveyed for settlement away back in the 1840s. It was to have been the route linking Sealers Cove with the other future settlements at Oberon Bay, Mount Singapore, Corner Basin and Yanakie. Others have surmised that it was made for the use of shipwrecked sailors in an age when shipwrecks were not uncommon on the east coast of the Promontory. From the quiet

waters of Sealers Cove a short overland journey along this bridle path would bring rescue and relief.

However, it should not be forgotten that human enterprises were operating on those eastern shores in the years before and after the middle of the 19<sup>th</sup> century and it is not unlikely that the track was one of the routes used by the loggers who were extracting timber from the then well-timbered gullies west of Sealers Cove and in the vicinity of Refuge Cove. At Sealers the last lap of the track ran straight to a jetty the remains of which, up to a few years ago, were still to be seen. Even today, at low tide, a line of stumps show where the jetty once stood.

By the end of the 1870s many of the various phases of activity on the Promontory were drawing to a close. The days of the sealer had long since passed. The fur seal had been practically exterminated years before that time although relics of the occupation by those industrious folk were still to be seen.

Timber logging had not yet been resumed.

Tin mining and squid fishing as major industries were yet to come.

The quietude was broken only by the lowing of grazing herds and the crackle of rifles and guns.

There was plenty to shoot and trap. Dingoes had a price on their scalps and "bear" [koala] skins and wallaby pelts were always in demand. The tracks were in frequent use.

## A Christmas Walking Tour

During the Christmas holidays of 1884 an event occurred which was to shape the destiny of the Promontory.

Three men, Messrs J. B. Gregory, A.H.S. Lucas and G.W. Robinson, undertook a walking tour from Trafalgar to the Lighthouse by way of the Yanakie Isthmus, the Darby River and Mount Oberon.

Lucas collected specimens for subsequent identification by the now-famous Baron von Mueller and later, in collaboration with Gregory, published an account of the trip in the second volume of the Victorian Naturalist, the journal and magazine of the Field Naturalists' Club of Victoria. The series of papers makes fascinating reading.

It was they who suggested that the Promontory could be regarded as an ideal resort for tourists and fishermen. They considered that it had little to recommend it for commercial development. Indeed, it is in no small measure due to them that Victoria now has Wilson's Promontory as a national park permanently reserved as a refuge and sanctuary for our country's wildlife as well as a resort where may be seen some of

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the most entrancing of Victoria's coastal scenery.

Their account of its potentialities as a tourist attraction aroused widespread interest but the very remoteness of the place from populated centres and the difficulties of access suggested that, for a long time to come, there would be little effort to develop them.

In their account of it they wrote:

"We may safely recommend the Promontory as full of interest to naturalists of all persuasions. Practically inaccessible as it is at present (1884) we believe that a future yet awaits is as a summer haunt of lovers of nature and lovers of scenery. In many respects alike, we prophesy that, as the Cornish Peninsula was later to be discovered by tourists, not many generations will pass before means of communication will enable Victorians to find out and do justice to this noble granite promontory—the Cornwall of Victoria."

The three men observed emu tracks and claim to have seen "Love Birds" (a common name for budgerigars) on Martin's Hill. It would be most surprising if they did indeed see budgerigars because they are birds peculiar to the dry inland regions of the Continent, but still, the Promontory is notable for the odd and unexpected plants and animals which have been found there. One may suppose that they saw Grass Parrots—birds which are common enough in various part of Gippsland.

The existence of emus anywhere on the Promontory was not confirmed by subsequent observers although they were known on Yanakie Isthmus further north. As the big birds are quite capable of swimming they could well have crossed the Darby River and actually been on Martin's Hill as accidental visitors at that time.

At any rate, years later, when the place finally became a national park, it was considered necessary to introduce them into the Promontory.

## The Skye Crofters

In 1887, three years after this notable walking tour, the government was being pressed to interest itself in the welfare of the fishermen operating in Bass Strait and off the coast of South Gippsland. From Western Port to Port Albert they were experiencing lean times. Transport of their catches to the metropolitan market was slow, uncertain and generally unsatisfactory. Sometimes on arrival the consignments were condemned as unfit for use.

On such occasions, instead of receiving a cheque for his produce, the unfortunate fisherman would get a bill for freight and other charges incidental to the receipt (and rejection) of his fish. Local demand was, of course, limited by the sparseness of population, and those engaged in the industry needed either an

assurance of a fair share of the Melbourne market of some other occupation which could supplement their income to compensate for the deficiencies caused by unsatisfactory transport or bad weather.

In the hope of maintaining good catches the more intrepid fishermen set up bases in various isolated places along the southern coast of Gippsland. One such place was Billy's Cove in Waterloo Bay where, in 1886, some had built themselves huts and laid down moorings. Other bases were in Oberon Bay, Refuge Cove and Sealers' Cove—a fact which, in some measure, accounts for the number of well-defined tracks which used to exist on the Promontory in the early days. Graziers and their cattle, timbermen, prospectors, construction gangs, all helped to make them and the visitor helped to keep them open.

As one will have already gathered, the Promontory, even so long ago, had its devotees some of whom obviously knew the place much more intimately than most of its present-day visitors.

The straightforward campaign for assisting and developing a big fishing industry in Victoria got rather complicated when a Mrs Gordon Baillie persuaded the Minister of Lands (Mr Dow) to look favourably on her scheme for settling a thousand impoverished Scottish Skye crofters on the South Gippsland coast.

The crofters were to be brought to the colony at the Government's expense, each given a small block of land where he could dwell with his compatriots in tight little community and fish to his heart's content. When not so occupied the crofters would work industriously on their colonial croft and so add to the prosperity and productivity of the province and the development of the colony.

There was plenty of Crown Land available since, by that time, most of the big pastoral runs had been abandoned or forfeited and subdivided for closer settlement.

The idea appealed to the Minister and his department was instructed to draw up plans for a land subdivision in which was to be included 45,000 acres of the Promontory.

Township sites were to be dotted here and there along the coast from Liptrap to Entrance Point. They were to be an integral part of the grand plan for the fishing industry and its associated canneries.

The scheme was dropped but not before the public and the Press had a lot to say about it. It seems likely that the main reason for its abandonment was not so much adverse public opinion but the fact that the land regulations then in force failed to provide for the subdivision of the big runs into small blocks.

By the time the publicity had subsided

Parliament was not in the mood to amend the Act.

The newspapers of July, 1887 dealt with the subject at some length. At first they thought Mrs Baillie's idea was a good one but, after a spate of letters from the already-established fishermen and their well-wishers which presented points of view not obvious to the Minister, their enthusiasm waned and eventually waxed to downright opposition.

Sixteen years later, when the matter of the permanent reservation of the Promontory was again being vigorously pursued, a sub-leader in "The Argus" included the following trenchant comment: "The reservation of Wilsons Promontory is not a new idea. Mr JL Purves, K.C., some years ago led a successful opposition to its proposed alienation, when the adventuress Mrs Gordon Baillie humbugged so many public men and one particular Lands Minister with her schemes for settling Highland crofters in Victoria. After her romantic plans had been shown-up, it was generally understood that the area would be reserved as a National Park."

The passing years had reduced the status of the lady to that of romantic humbugging adventuress and Mr Dow (the "particular Lands Minister") was seen to have been nothing less than what we now colloquially term "a sucker".

Purves, on the other hand, was raised to the rank of leader of the anti-crofter element!

In 1887 Purves had a lot to say. He was at one time a member of Parliament and, on other counts, a prominent citizen of the times. A long letter of his in "The Argus" of the 16th July described the Promontory as he knew it from regular and frequent trips made over a period of several years. Parts of the letter are worth quoting for the picture they give of the place as seen through his shrewd and observant eyes.

"The peninsula consists of a backbone of mountains whose valley-seamed sides run down to an indented coastline providing an eastern and western water-shed.

Down each valley runs a stream of greater or less magnitude which, in some cases join, and so provide a considerable creek, which debouches in one of the numerous bays or coves which abound in the locality.... The interior is more difficult of access because of the almost tropical richness of the vegetation in the bottom of these...although the mountain tops and ridges are barren and useless for present agricultural and pastoral purposes yet there is a very considerable area of country which, when cleared, would be of great value. No doubt there are heathy plains lying between Cape Singapore and Banner Creek, draining Vereker Range but, with this exception,

almost all the land is heavily timbered which in my experience is not a sign of barren soil.

As a contrast to these heathy plains at Chinaman's Bend or Station Bight<sup>1</sup>, take the rich bottoms at Sealers' Cove, Refuge Cove, the lagoons at Five Mile Beach, Biddy's Camp and on the eastern watershed at Oberon and Norman Bays. The jungle at these places consists of swamp tea-tree, tree ferns, bracken, sword grass, musk, supplejack and similar scrub, which I think does not indicate feeble soil.

Above all this towers a forest of gums which extends to the mountain tops.

A few words now with regard to the coastline.

Its beauty is undeniable..... To the west we find Oberon and Norman Bays — the former well named so far as its beauty is concerned and affording a safe harbour for craft of all sizes in most weather. To the east there is hardly a mile of coast which does not afford a good and safe shelter for small craft and, besides, there are several harbours fitted for large ships.

Starting from the Lighthouse there is Waterloo Bay, well known as a harbour of refuge for ships navigating Bass's Straits. Within its bounds are several convenient coves, notably Billy's Cove..... Three miles northerly is Refuge Cove, named by the pioneers of Gippsland "Lady Bay" from its loveliness — a perfect little gem of a harbour whose land-locking shores provide a frame worthy of the picture. Here are two beautiful beaches behind which extend valleys such as I have already mentioned. ....Thence rounding Horn Point the visitor sails into another charming bay, Sealers Cove, whose shallow waters teem with the choicest fish. Thence rounding a bold headland one reaches the Five Mile Beach, where either extremity provides an excellent anchorage in most weathers and, when a south-eastern necessitates a change, shelter is to be found either under Rabbit Island or in one of the aforementioned coves.

Leaving Rabbit Island, the coastline is a series of harbours under Mount Hunter, at Cape Singapore; thence southerly in any of the numerous bays and bights which line the Inlet. From each of these the land rises rapidly, providing admirable township sites. The summer climate is superb and those who know the miseries of a December night in Melbourne would relish one between blankets in Waterloo Bay or Sealers' Cove."

His letter was written not merely to extol the scenic attractions of the Promontory but as a kind of counterblast to the publicity being given to Mrs Gordon Baillie's plan.

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Purves was not objecting to settlement on the Promontory but to the proposal to alienate it in the interests of monopolies, “be they philanthropists or speculators”.

Another correspondent held a different view of its potential for the proposed scheme. He claimed to have “traversed the Promontory on foot from end to end and to have had a bird’s-eye view of large part of its surface.”

He observed that “the greater part of it consists of granite mountains covered with masses of rock which must be forever impossible to plough.”

He went on — “there are great morasses in which a horse would founder. There are very few sandy flats on which there is some pasture but so light is the soil that the beasts which depasture on it pull up by the roots the herbs they eat and so, year by year, render the feed poorer. Moreover, beasts left long on these pastures die of coast disease so that it is impossible to breed livestock. It is not to be wondered at that the Station [no doubt referring to Yanakie] has been abandoned and no one else is disposed to take it up again.

Mr Purves says that parts of the peninsula are heavily timbered and part covered with dense scrub.

What timber I saw was in the distance, growing on very steep slopes, especially those on Mount Latrobe. I skirted dense scrub of great extent of the sort described by Mr Purves on the Darby River and approached such a scrub on the Tidal River but in both cases it covered a swamp. I doubt therefore whether there is land of any appreciable extent left for agricultural purposes ....the only possible roads are very steep pack tracks ....”

After alluding to the certain disabilities which the scheme would impose on the settlers the correspondent (who signed himself “G” and probably was J.B. Gregory, the walking tourist of 1884) went on to describe the scenery of the place in lyrical terms:

“ It is a delightful place for a tourist.

The granite mountains, so unpromising to the settler, are eminently picturesque and from the barren tops and sides of many of them is to be observed that look-out so commonly wanting among the wooded ranges of Victoria. And what a look-out; sea and sky, bays with pearly beaches, rocky headlands and islands with a background of timbered or stony peaks.

There are not many places in Victoria where one can find a summit rising 2,000 feet from the water’s edge. I think anyone who has stood on the top of Mount Oberon or the brow of Mount Southern or has sat on the shore of the Great Bay and watched the clouds gather and disperse about Mount Wilson will bear me out that he has enjoyed a sight not easily surpassed.

There are many other beauties on the peninsula.

Plateaux with lumps of granite standing round like a natural Stonehenge; streams of crystal clear water falling through delightful rocky and wooded gorges. The place, moreover, is a paradise for the naturalist. The native fauna abounds in great variety. I know nowhere within easy reach of Melbourne where one may see the walk of an emu and, so soon as the Great Southern Railway is completed, Wilson’s Promontory will be within easy reach of it. I hope, therefore ... that following the example of the Americans, steps will be taken to preserve Wilson’s Promontory for the purpose for which it is eminently fitted—that is, a national park. To do so would not only preserve a source of healthy recreation for the vast population of Melbourne [it was 405,520 in 1887!] but be of eminent advantage to science in preserving the native animals from extinction. Wilson’s Promontory, being separated from the mainland by a long, narrow isthmus covered with hills of shifting sands is perhaps the only place where they could be left unmolested without the risk of injuring the selectors.”

This “long narrow isthmus covered with hills of shifting sands” comprised the southern end of the Yanakie Run which, like the several Promontory Runs, had been abandoned after more than 25 years of occupation by a succession of optimists. In the circumstances, this was hardly to be wondered at. What was reason for wonderment was the optimism of Smythe and Black, Bennison and their several successors and pioneers like Baragwanath and Fraser who believed they could profit handsomely by occupying the country. The aetiology of coast disease was not then understood; nor were the other consequences of mineral deficiencies of those almost sterile coastal sandy soils.

Opinions about the peculiar merits of the Skye crofters were at variance too. Mrs Gordon Baillie could think of no more industrious and deserving people. Although it is safe to say she had not consulted them, she was convinced that they would jump at the opportunity of departing from their homeland to make a fresh start in a new country even though they might have to endure hardships as many and as severe as were their lot on the Isle of Skye.

One correspondent to the daily paper pointed out that they might not want to leave Skye anyway and, as for being industrious, he could say, from and intimate acquaintance with them, that “the ordinary Skye crofter nowadays is a man who will do no work of any description if he can manage to exist (or he is supported) without it, and much prefers to loaf around with his hands in his pockets, occasionally condescending to walk complacently smoking beside his wife or sister, giving her the privilege of carrying a huge close-packed creel of peats on her back.”



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He didn't think much of the crofters.

And the local fishermen. What did they think of the scheme?

If there were going to be any handouts by a beneficent government there were scattered about the coastal settlements plenty of deserving cases who would be glad to receive them. These folk were already contributing to the development of their country and getting mighty little in return. The menace of competition from a thousand fishermen from overseas was like adding insult to injury.

All this publicity stirred Gregory and Lucas to action and, through them, the Field Naturalists' Club organised a deputation to the Minister seeking the reservation of the whole of the Promontory as a national park.

The Minister assured the representatives of the Club, the Royal Society of Victoria, the Royal Geographical Society and the Academy of Arts that there was every possibility that the greater part of it would be reserved. But nothing came of it.

### Footnote

<sup>1</sup> Station Bight is a locality name not now used. The writer has not been able to determine its precise location but he believes the word "Station" to refer either to the station or homestead associated with one of the old pastoral runs in the locality. If so the Bight would be a small cove at the foot of Mount Singapore or else that section of the Inlet shore where Barry's Creek empties. "Banner Creek" is doubtless Barry's Creek.

## Chapter 5: Land Subdivision, Surveys and Temporary Reserves

In 1890 the Field Naturalists' Club again approached Mr Dow, who claimed to be in complete accord with the objects of the deputation. He assured them that the 'remainder' of the Promontory (whatever that might have been) would be permanently reserved for State purposes and that suitable regulations for the management of the reserve would be prepared by the Lands Department and submitted to the Club for approval. It sounded all very well. It was now only a question of waiting for the Government to act.

It did, but not in the way so cheerfully anticipated.

District surveys were going on steadily and patiently. The old holdings were being broken up in accordance with the provisions of the amended Land Acts.

Seaforth and Yanakie townships had been proclaimed in the previous year, and in either 1891 or 1892 Black and his party were busily laying out the pattern for the future town.

In 1892 the Postal and Telegraph Department seized a few acres at the Darby River and, in 1893, the old Yanakie Station was truncated, the dismembered piece from Shallow Inlet to the Darby River being brought into the new parish of Yanakie South.

Both Yanakie and Yanakie South were subdivided into a number of large grazing blocks which were thrown open for long term lease but without pre-emptive rights.

Sheet 2 of County map 7A indicates that the new parish contained over 70 allotments lying north and south of an area of 23,000 acres of Common land.

The southern group included seven or eight blocks which were taken up by the Buckleys, Cotters and Falls. One of them, Block 76, contained the site of the Yanakie Station "Old Homestead" which had been built by Bennison about 35 years previously.

The main mass of the Promontory did not escape the burst of surveying. The old 'runs' were resurrected as grazing leases and these were duly offered on a six-yearly lease—25,000 acres on the Singapore Peninsula, 20,000 acres on Corner Basin and 33,000 acres at Oberon Bay. Perhaps with the thought in mind that coastal settlements might spring up in the south, 22,000 acres of the southern end of the Promontory were withheld from grazing.

The Great Southern Railway, having been opened to Port Albert with great rejoicing in January 1892, was expected to do big things in stabilising closer settlement in South Gippsland, and the flow of newcomers to the region seemed to foreshadow tremendous developments.

The developments, however, were not of a kind anticipated by the people who wanted Wilsons Promontory reserved as a national park. Timber logging,

based on Sealers Cove, was resumed. Dingo hunters and trappers occupied themselves lucratively. Tin prospectors fanned out over the hills and valleys of the place and gradually concentrated on the Singapore Peninsula.

In fact it seemed that Wilsons Promontory possessed a far greater potential for economic development, or at least exploitation, than had been thought possible by Gregory and Lucas and the government of their day. Nevertheless, the Club and its supporters persisted in the campaign, and the Government, after having considered the matter for something like eight years, eventually sponsored the following historic announcement which appeared on page 2690 of the Victoria Gazette of July, 1898:

"Land Temporarily Reserved from Sale, etc."

"Wilson's Promontory—Site of a National Park, 91,000 acres more or less in the county of Buln Buln, Parishes of Beek Beek, Warreen, Kulk and Tallang:<sup>1</sup> Commencing at a point on the shore of Bass Strait in line with the east boundaries of Blocks 74 and 76, Parish of Yanakie south; bounded thence by a line, the said blocks and a line bearing north to the shore of Corner Inlet, thence by that shore north-easterly and northerly to the south boundary of the township of Seaforth, thence by that boundary bearing east to the shore of Bass Strait aforesaid; and thence by that shore southerly, westerly and north-westerly to the point of commencement. Excepting the lighthouse reserve and the allotments at Refuge Cove surveyed by Matthew Watson, Alexander Watson and James Watson respectively, and the roads in connection therewith."

(Signed) R.W. Best. Commissioner of Crown Lands & Survey.

The area covered by the survey of E. Scanlon as shown in Plan B175, dated 1st December 1898, included part of this 91,000 acres. His plan shows what appears to be the one and only specifically defined boundary between the several parishes into which the Promontory was divided at that time—that between Yanakie South and Beek Beek.

Yanakie itself had been split into two parishes. The whole of Singapore Peninsula was included in the parish of Warreen. Beek Beek was bounded in the north by the shore of Corner Basin, on the west by Yanakie South, on the east by Warreen and on the south by Kulk.

Kulk embraced the central portion of the Promontory. The southern section became the parish of Tallang, bounded on three sides by the ocean and on the north by Kulk.

It would appear that the Yanakie South – Beek Beek boundary line was from the southernmost point on the shore of Corner Basin (near a spot which came



Field naturalists camped at Oberon Bay, Wilsons Promontory, 1905.

Photo courtesy Historic Places, Department of Sustainability and Environment, Victoria

to be known as the South-west Corner, where the Vereker Landing jetty was built in later years) along a line running due south across the Darby River and terminating near the point where Whisky Creek empties into the ocean at Picnic Bay.

The boundary between Tallang and Kulk was probably a line drawn from the mouth of Growlers Creek at Oberon Bay through Mount Wilson to Refuge Cove.

An east to west line drawn through Mount Boulder and terminating at the south end of Three Mile Beach would very likely have fixed the boundary between Warreen and Beek Beek while Beek Beek would have been separated from Kulk by a line through Mount Leonard and Mount Latrobe to Five Mile Beach.

These are all well established trig points and the surveyors would have had little need to be very precise about locating the boundaries because, at the time of the survey, there seemed little likelihood of the hinterland of the Promontory ever being settled by freeholders. Whatever settlement the Government might envisage was almost certain to be confined to the coastal portions and special surveys could be undertaken in such an eventuality. Eventualities of that nature had arisen from time to time. The special survey for the Watson brothers which was referred to in the Gazette notice quoted above was a case in point. The “roads thereto” were something of a figment of the draftsman’s imagination because no roads were ever surveyed. Even if they had been, they would have had to be in impossible situations. The brothers would not have wanted roads anyway. They were fishermen and much more at home on the sea ‘roads’ than on any Promontory roads. Their request for the selections had been refused after some eighteen months’ consideration and consequently no

further survey problems arose at Refuge Cove.

Towards the end of 1898 someone else wanted 1,000 acres to grow flax. His application was refused. About ten years later another man was prepared to lease land on Singapore Peninsula to breed Angora goats! There was always someone willing to try to put the land to better use than that for which it was most eminently suited.

As separation into parishes is a normal procedure before subdivision, one may suppose that the government of the day contemplated big plans for opening up the Promontory; but its gazettal as a site for a national park and its proclamation as a fauna sanctuary meant that such plans would have to be shelved—for the time being at least.

The fact that Yanakie South, while it was still an integral part of the big parish of Yanakie, had been already surveyed into the aforementioned allotments almost certainly accounts for the exclusion of the southern portion of it from the area designated as a site for a national park. Had the decision to reserve the place come a few years earlier it is quite possible that the Yanakie–Yanakie South boundary would have become the northernmost limits of the Park.

## The Game Laws and Regulations

Through the influence of the Piscatorial Council the site for the national park received considerable attention in the year 1898. In September of that year, in Gazette No. 83, came notice of intention to proclaim, under the Fisheries Act 1890, a close season for the whole year for all fish “within the limits of the 91,000 acres proposed for the national park”.

The close season, when it was proclaimed, applied to every creek, river or stream or other waters within the

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specified limits. Hot on the heels of the Proclamation came another in the following October which prohibited “the killing or destruction of any native game mentioned in or from time to time by proclamation as aforesaid included in the Third Schedule to the Game Act 1890 as aforesaid.”

This Order was signed by the Governor, the Right Honourable Thomas, Baron Brassey, and the Commissioner of Trade and Customs, Mr R W Best.

In case there was likely to be any doubt about what was included in the Third Schedule, His Lordship and Mr Best, on the advice of the Executive Council, followed up with a supplementary Proclamation which made it clear that this Schedule included all Australian fauna *with the exception of snakes*. This Order was on page 3916 of the Gazette of the 4th November 1898.

It was a bit hard on snakes as a class because of those species which could possibly occur on the Promontory only the Tiger, Copperhead and Black Snake could be considered at all dangerous to man.

Not so many years ago the late Crosbie Morrison suggested that one of the islands of the National Park should be made a special sanctuary for snakes, but there was such an indignant outcry from the herpetophobes in the land that his scheme was abandoned. On general ecological grounds it did not have a great deal to commend it anyhow.

The Proclamation restricting fishing in the waters of the reserve must have seemed rather severe, or perhaps there was some administrative difficulty consequent upon its operation, for in December an open season was proclaimed under the Fisheries Act.

It designated the season in which fish might be taken legally within the boundaries of the 91,000-acre reserve.

It took about 250 words to tell citizens that the open season was from the 1st July to the 8th July inclusive in each year!

Seven days in mid-winter in which to fish seems hardly worth the trouble of having an open season at all.

This curious document was published on page 4059 of the Gazette of 23 December 1898 and the Order remained in force for about 38 years. It might have continued for ever had not the increasing popularity of the Park caused the authorities to review the matter.

Anglers would trip down to the national park for a holiday, anticipating a week or two of quiet angling in the deep tidal streams, only to find that there was a prohibition against it except during the first week in July. They had to content themselves with casting their lines into the surf or dropping them over the rocks at places like Tongue Point.

They were, of course, perfectly free to catch fish or

anything else outside high water mark on any part of the coast of the Promontory.

When the intention to make the 1898 Proclamation was announced there was a howl from the professional fishermen who operated in Corner Basin and off the coast of the Promontory. They anticipated that the close season would apply to marine fish as well, but a deputation and ministerial assurances satisfied them that their industry was in no danger. About the only effect it had on them (or some of them) was that it prevented them spreading their nets across the mouth of the tidal streams to catch the outgoing schools of fish which had come up those streams to spawn or those which merely took advantage of an incoming tide to travel into the tidal reaches of the rivers to feed and to depart with the outgoing tide.

Fred Lewis, the Chief Inspector of Fisheries and Game, successfully moved to have the Proclamation revoked. Neither he, his Department nor the Committee of Management of the National Park knew why the regulation was proclaimed. Any document which might have enlightened them had long since disappeared. Such documents belonged originally to the State Department of Trade and Customs which, in 1898, administered the Fisheries Act, but when the Commonwealth took over the functions of that Department, it supposedly took over and retained the files as well.

Lewis could see no reason why visitors to the National Park should be debarred from angling in the streams there. The Committee of Management agreed with him and, on Lewis's recommendation, the Proclamation was revoked in June 1936.

About the only other detail which needed tidying up concerned the manner in which fish could be taken from those few streams where worthwhile catches were to be expected. Accordingly, in September 1952, a Proclamation under the Fisheries Acts prohibited the use of trammels, trawls and other nets or engines at any time within a radius of a quarter of a mile of the mouth of the Tidal River.

Lord Brassey's Proclamation of the 31st October 1898 concerning the protection of native game referred only to the 91,000 acres mentioned in the Order which defined the boundaries of the land temporarily reserved from sale. As ten years later 75,000 acres of it was permanently reserved as a National Park the game protection order had to be amended to meet the new situation and this was effected by Proclamation under the Game Acts by Governor Sir Gibson Carmichael. It was published on page 4118 of the Gazette of the 7th September 1910.

As the relevant part of the 1898 Proclamation has been already quoted on page ••• it might be of interest



to compare the new one with it. It was headed:

“Protection of Native Game of all kinds at Wilson’s Promontory and Portion of Corner Inlet.”

Proclamation.

“.....the part of Victoria hereinafter described shall be a locality in which from 1st January to 31st December (both days inclusive) in each year it shall be unlawful for any person to kill or destroy any native game set forth in the Third Schedule to the Game Act 1890.

Part of Victoria referred to above (stated in the preamble to the order):-

Commencing at a point being high water mark at Yanakie or Millar’s Landing, parish of Yanakie on the western side of Corner Basin (shown on the Lands Department’s original plan W/384.B as Corner Inlet); thence by a direct line bearing north sixty-six degrees east magnetic towards the summit of Mount Singapore to within five chains of the foreshore of Wilson’s Promontory northerly, easterly, southerly, westerly and northerly to a point north-west from the mouth of the Darby River; thence easterly to an by a line parallel to and north of Darby River to the western boundary of the National Park permanently reserved by Order in Council of 25th February 1905; thence north, west, north, north westerly and north easterly by the said boundary of the Park as amended by Order in Council of 18th August 1908 to high water mark on the south western shore of Corner Basin; thence northerly by high water mark to the commencing point.”

(Signed) T. Carmichael.

Geo. Graham, Minister of Agriculture.

This new regulation took in more than the National Park. It included a slice of the Yanakie Common from the old Yanakie Landing down to the mouth of the Darby River and a considerable part of the waters of the Basin.

When the Park regulations were published in September 1908 they included two which dealt specifically with animals.

Regulation 3 stated the “No person shall shoot, poison, trap, snare, hook, catch or otherwise destroy or interfere with or take away any animal, eggs, skins or feathers of any description or carry any firearms, poison, traps, snares or guns within the National Park without the permission in writing of the Committee of Management first obtained.”

In their anxiety to be comprehensive they had overdone it. Anything that is not a mineral or a vegetable is an animal so theoretically sanctuary for snakes was restored by the regulation.

Regulation 8 read: “No person shall bring into the

National park any animal of any description without the permission in writing of the Committee of Management.”

The matter of cattle grazing was looked after by the proviso “that money received for agistment shall be expended in the maintenance, stocking and improvement of the Park” and that “an account thereof shall be furnished annually to the Board of Land and Works.” In case there were people who considered dogs were not animals Regulation 11 rather unnecessarily ordered that “no person shall bring into the National Park any dog without the permission of the Committee of Management.”

## **A Site for a National Park**

To return to 1898. The spate of Proclamations, Orders in Council, Notices and Regulations which began to flow in that year implied that something had been really achieved. The Promontory had been saved for posterity.

But had it?

While this paperwork was proceeding in Melbourne, the site for a national park continued to be a hive of activity. Its status as a fauna sanctuary was at a low ebb.

The threat of permanent reservation appeared to stir to greater effort everyone who had the slightest interest in exploiting its natural resources.

The Government, having reserved it from sale—temporarily—sat back, as it were, and reconsidered the situation for five or six years.

The interval was long enough to cause public interest in “the site for a national park” to flag somewhat. Governments lost interest too. They had other pressing problems.

Form 1899 governments followed one another in quick succession, arriving at the Premiership of Sir Thomas Bent in February 1904.

A Government that could appease the land-hungry would be assured of support and Sir Thomas was not the man to neglect such a policy of appeasement. During his term of office settlers flocked to the land—any land.

Victoria was being “opened up” again. The search for suitable areas was intensified. There were 91,000 acres lying idle on Wilson’s Promontory and the question of utilising this large area to better advantage needed re-examination.

Who better qualified to inspire such a process than Tommy Bent, the man who had encouraged the virtual annihilation of the great Sandringham heathlands, who had “opened up” the Dandenong Ranges? Under his guidance the Promontory was marked down by Cabinet for sub-division into 1,000-acre blocks and,

early in 1904, the Secretary for Lands was instructed accordingly.

The immediate result was that applications were invited from would-be settlers to occupy the several blocks.

The advertisement was the first intimation to the members of the Field Naturalists' Club that all was not well with the 'site for a national park'. It dawned upon them that it had been only *temporarily* reserved from sale—not as a national park either, but only as a site for one.

A deputation was swiftly organised by the leaders of the Club, the Royal Society of Victoria and the Ornithologists' Union—the third of a series that this contentious Promontory made necessary.

Professor Baldwin Spencer, Messrs T. S. Hall, A. D. Hardy, O. A. Sayce and F. Wisewould formed the deputation and they were introduced to the Minister of Lands (Mr John Murray) by their fellow member, the Hon. Frank Madden, Speaker of the Legislative Assembly and, as a result of their eloquent plea for the permanent reservation of the Promontory, Cabinet revoked its earlier decision and the sub-division was cancelled.

It looked as though Mr Best's Ministerial direction of 1898 needed re-statement in rather more definite terms and this, it appeared, could be brought about only by pressure of public opinion.

All who have given thought to the matter are agreed that a good politician is one who is sensitive to public opinion. They also recognise that public opinion is rarely spontaneous. It needs shaping and moulding.

The Field Naturalists decided that, if Victorians were to have Wilsons Promontory as a national park, they would have to do the shaping and moulding.

The Australian Natives' Association, at its annual conference, took up the matter with enthusiasm and passed a resolution in favour of the reservation of the whole of the Promontory as a national park. This was followed by the formation of a large committee of prominent citizens to press the matter to a conclusion. It was headed by the Acting Lord Mayor of Melbourne and heavily weighted with members of Parliament, all anxious to assist the cause.

This "softening up" process assured the success of the public meeting arranged by the scientific societies for the evening of the 7th October 1904 in the Athenaeum Hall. It was given advance publicity in the form of a leading article in *The Argus* newspaper which drew attention to the suitability of the Promontory as a national park by describing its special scenic features and pointing out the peculiar advantages it possessed over any other part of the



Mrs Anna Hardy collecting plant specimens at Oberon Flat during the Field Naturalists Club of Victoria 1905 excursion to Wilsons Promontory.

Photo courtesy Historic Places, Department of Sustainability and Environment, Victoria

State for the preservation of its native wildlife.

"Not even a rod of fencing is required to isolate it, for the bare and evershifting sand dunes on the narrow western neck are a natural barrier, cutting it off from the mainland."—a description which did scant justice to the Yanakie Isthmus, nor did it flatter the perspicacity of those settlers who occupied blocks on it.

However, the writer's intentions were good and the article concluded — "There are no grounds for assuming that the Ministry of Parliament are not in sympathy with the object for which the meeting is being held. A small part of the Promontory is being used at present as rough grazing ground for store cattle, but the interests of a few individual graziers will not stand in the way of a public purpose."

At the meeting the Lieutenant Governor and Chief Justice of Victoria presided and on the platform sat an imposing array of notable gentlemen.

The principal speaker was Professor Baldwin Spencer and he was supported by Mr Carty-Salmon, MHR (representing the A. N. A.), the Rev. Dr Bevan, Mr Frank Stuart, MLC, Mr G.M. Prendegast, MLA, Mr E.G. Fitzgibbon (Town Clerk of Melbourne) and the Chairman's naturalist brother, the Hon. Frank Madden.

Presumably some of them spoke briefly because the program included the screening of a selection of lantern slides of scenes on Wilsons Promontory and in national parks in the USA, New Zealand and New South Wales. These were projected by Mr J Searle, the Naturalists' Club lanternist, and described by Dr Bird, who, it was stated, had spent many holidays on the Promontory.

Mr Fitzgibbon moved —

"That this meeting request the Government to permanently reserve Wilson's Promontory as a National Park and vest it in trustees."



Field naturalists at Sealers Cove jetty, c.1910.

Photo courtesy Historic Places, Department of Sustainability and Environment, Victoria

As the champion of the cause, Fitzgibbon—a man remembered for his vehement advocacy of parklands for the people—was an excellent choice. His eloquence as much as the quality of the photographs and lantern slides used to illustrate the addresses must surely have convinced those present that here indeed was a place worth treasuring for its superb scenery alone.

The motion was supported by several speakers and carried with acclamation.

A further motion, by Mr Stuart, brought about the appointment of an influential committee to present Fitzgibbon's resolution to the Minister. It took some time for the committee to make the necessary arrangements but, on the 7th December, representatives of the FNCV, the Royal Society, the Royal Geographical Society, the ANA, the Ornithologists' Union, the trustees of both the Public Library and Exhibition Building, the Victorian Piscatorial Council and the Zoological and Acclimatization society met Mr John Murray, the Minister of Lands.

This fourth deputation secured a promise from the Minister that 75, 000 acres of Wilson's Promontory would be permanently reserved as a national park and his promise was fulfilled on the 25 January, 1905 when the following notice appeared in the Victoria Gazette of that date—

"Land Proposed to be Permanently Reserved from Sale."

"Wilson's Promontory: Site for a National Park about to be permanently reserved, being that part of the site temporarily reserved therefore by Order of 7th July 1898, – Seventyfive thousand acres more or less, County of Buln Buln, Parishes of Beek Beek, Warreen, Kulk and Tallang, commencing at the north east angle of allotment 76, parish of Yanakie South, bounded thence by a line bearing north to a point where it would be intersected by a line running parallel with the shore of Corner Inlet at a distance of forty chains from high water mark, thence by the latter line bearing north easterly and northerly to the south boundary of the township of Seaforth, thence by that boundary bearing east to a point where it would be intersected by a line running parallel to the shore of Bass Strait at a distance of forty chains from high water mark, thence by that line bearing southerly, westerly and north westerly to a point in line with the east boundary of allotment 74, Parish of Yanakie South and thence by a line, the last mentioned allotment and allotment 78 aforesaid bearing north to the point of commencement."

(signed) J Murray, Commissioner of Crown Lands & Survey.

This proposal was confirmed by an Order in Council made one month later and gazetted on the 8th March.

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The difference between the 91,000 acres which had been temporarily reserved as a site and the 75,000 acres which eventuated as the permanent reserve was due to the exclusion of a half-mile coastal strip around the whole of the Promontory.

It was an odd arrangement because, although the people of Victoria had gained their national park, at no point did it have a sea frontage. Without such a frontage its special virtue as a wildlife conservation area would be almost nullified. The imaginary boundary line running forty chains inland and parallel to the coast could hardly compare in effectiveness with the ocean and “the bare, evershifting sand dunes” mentioned by *The Argus* leader writer some months earlier.

However, the half-mile strip was still temporarily reserved and the whole area was still a sanctuary for native fauna. The only real change was that, under the new order, the 75,000 acres acquired a new status. It was no longer available for commercial exploitation, hence timber logging and milling would have to cease—which they eventually did.

The timber tram lines were taken up, the machinery removed and the rest of the outfit abandoned. The saw pits, sawdust heaps, ramps, staging and bridges slowly disappeared through the agencies of Nature and bush fires.

## The First Biological Survey

At last, after a struggle of twenty years, the Club and its associates felt that something of importance to the community had been achieved. The dream had come true.

It seemed that it would be left largely to the Club to develop a national park that would be treasured by the people of all generations. Time would tell whether that hope would be realised but the enthusiastic Club members lost no time in making Victorians aware of the great asset that had been won for them.

The first step was a thorough examination of the National Park—a stocktaking of its natural resources and an assessment of its potential as a nature conservation area.

This was a task that called for energy as well as enthusiasm but these were qualities generously represented in the team of scientists and naturalists who, during the summer vacation of 1905, undertook the first of a series of biological surveys.

The team comprised T.S. Hall, A.D. Hardy, A.S. Kenyon, J.A. Kershaw, J.A. Leach and G.B. Pritchard who, following their eight-day sojourn, published in the Club's journal of April 1906 what is still regarded as a valuable contribution to the scientific study of the Promontory. Some notes from their report are of interest in the light

of our present knowledge of the condition and natural history of the National Park.

Rabbits had not, at that time, reached the Promontory. Wild dogs were a pest. As Hardy remarked, they were not true dingoes but the progeny of domestic dogs left by fishermen, selectors and hunters. These animals had interbred with the dingo to an extent that had almost effaced the latter. The dogs were destroying both koala and black-tailed wallaby.

With the approval of the Lands Department the party laid over one hundred baits.

They found no evidence of the presence of kangaroo, platypus and lyrebird.

Hardy also remarked that a sawmill was still operating at Sealers' Cove and that, since the place was now a national park, it should be stopped.

The report recommended that a vermin-proof fence should be built across the narrow isthmus so that kangaroo, platypus, lyrebird, emu and other animals at that time considered as absent from the Park, could be introduced and contained.

No reference was made to foxes. Presumably they were absent. It was also mentioned that the demand for wallaby and koala skins from the Promontory had been, in the past, so great that over 2,000 of each had been removed in one year! (Remember that in November 1898 the Promontory had been gazetted as a sanctuary for native fauna.)

The systematic survey of the flora and fauna indicated the presence of 182 species of plant whose identity was recognisable in mid-summer, 100 species of shellfish, 13 crustaceans (including crabs, crayfish and yabbies), 71 birds (including the alien starling), 11 reptiles (including 10 lizards and the copperhead snake), 67 beetles, 50 moths and butterflies and about 30 or 40 insects belonging to other natural orders.

Spiders, scrub ticks, leaches, sandflies, fleas and bed bugs were not listed although surely some of them must have been seen and felt. The bed bugs had not at that time been introduced!

The information gleaned during this Christmas camp-out was used to further publicise the Park at a subsequent public meeting held in the Masonic Hall. A report of the event stated that more than 1,000 people attended to hear Dr T.S. Hall give an address which he illustrated with lantern slides and photographs taken during the expedition. The emphasis was on the peculiar suitability of the reserve as a place for the protection and conservation of the country's flora and fauna but it was considered that no really serious effort in this direction would be successful until the reserve had a sea frontage—which it then lacked—and, as well, a barrier (in the form of a fence) to free movement of



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fauna to and from the Park and the Yanakie Isthmus.

Publicity of this kind inspired others to explore the new National Park.

In the following year occurred the first official excursion to the Promontory by members of the Melbourne Walking and Touring Club. The adventures of the four participants are recalled in an amusing reminiscence by their leader, W. E. Briggs, writing in *The Melbourne Walker*, Volume 5 of 1935.

The publicity had another effect—that of bringing together, by a community of interest, people in all walks of life who wanted something done to preserve and protect Victoria's scenic places before the spread of settlement made such a thing impossible. They came together as a National Parks Association under the secretaryship of Dr J. W. (later, Sir James) Barrett, and through the medium of the new organisation naturalists were able to reach a much broader section of the general public than the more specialist organisations had been able to do. With its backing the government was persuaded to add to the Park the formerly excluded half-mile strip.

This was effected by Order made on the 18th August 1908 and published on page 4161 of the Gazette issued the following day. It read—

“Land Permanently reserved from Sale.”

“In pursuance of the Land Act 1901 (etc.) ....the Governor ..... has .....reserved from sale permanently the land hereinafter mentioned viz.—

Wilson's Promontory – Land for a National Park and for sites to establish, when required, pilot stations, lighthouses and other aids to navigation.”

In this way some 26,000 acres of territory was added to the 75,000 acres permanently reserved in 1905. The Order, incidentally, revealed the purpose of the original exclusion of the half-mile strip. It was to provide for any future requirement of “pilot stations, lighthouses and other aids to navigation.”

The passage of time showed that 26,000 acres was rather more than was really necessary for such purposes and the actual foreshore reserves were limited to several 10-chain strips on the east coast—at Sealers' Cove, Refuge Cove and Waterloo Bay—and on the west coast at Oberon Bay and, of course, the half-mile radius of territory inland from the South East Point Lighthouse. These exclusions from the National Park still obtain.

They are for the benefit of those, travelling by sea, who find it necessary to shelter from gales. They are, nevertheless, under the jurisdiction and control of the Committee of Management of the National Park.

The same Gazette announced the names of the Committee of Management of the Park and also defined

the area they were charged to administer. The notice is an important item in a long series of official documents relating to Wilsons Promontory and, to the citizens of Victoria in 1908, it must have appeared as though it were the last word on the subject.

To the people of today it is seen as an incident, albeit an important one, in the long story of the birth and development in Victoria of the National Park concept.

Other national parks have come into being but in some instances their birth pangs have been so slight as to have passed without much public comment. People the world over, and their governments, have come to recognise national parks as institutions to which they are entitled and which are essential for the well-being of a community.

The question which troubles people today [circa 1960] is “How much of our economically utilisable State can be spared for further national parks and nature reserves?”

In 1908 there was a feeling of urgency about the problem of saving the State's scenic places from impending desolation. A National Parks Association came into existence to plead the cause of nature conservation. Victoria profited exceedingly by the efforts of that Association and its associates but the goal was never reached. Two world wars intervened to divert public attention from the program of scenery preservation so that today the goal is not easily attainable.

The struggle to retain even samples of that which still remains is harder now. Where fifty years ago one tenth of the State could have been set aside as public parkland without detriment to its economy, today we will deem ourselves fortunate if a government can be persuaded to accept the principle that one twentieth of our territory should be set aside in this way. Every inch of land in the eyes of so many has a value measured so generously in terms of economics as to outweigh its worth as an amenity for the people.

The new Victorian National Parks Association which was born in 1952 has found that out. It has also found that the mere labelling of a place as a national park does not necessarily mean that the reserve remains inviolate. There is always someone eager enough to attempt to gain some exclusive profit by exploiting it and today there is nothing more convincing than the plea that such attempts at exploitation for private gain are in the interests of State development.

One may well pause to reflect and ask “Development for what?”

“How much of our economically utilisable State can be spared...?” It was just such a question which delayed for nearly 25 years the consummation of Gregory's

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dream in 1884. The Notice quoted above made the dream a reality.

**Footnote**

<sup>1</sup> These parish names are of Aboriginal derivation and their meanings are given in the chapter devoted to the origin and meaning of place names on the Promontory.

It was a happy custom of many of the early surveyors to use Aboriginal words for parishes and counties wherever practicable – a custom which has made a singular contribution to the maintenance of interest in the language of the Aborigines and one which had been encouraged by Major Mitchell when he was Surveyor-General of the Colony of New South Wales.



## Chapter 6: National Park Committee of Management

The boundaries of the national park were now settled and, in accordance with a practice authorised by the Land Act, an honorary committee of management was appointed.

On page 4161 of the Victoria Gazette of the 19th August 1908 this notice appeared:

“Committee of Management of a reserve for a National Park in the Parishes of Beek Beek, Warreen, Kulk, Tallang and Yanakie South and of a reserve in the township of Seaforth and Parishes of Beek Beek, Warreen, Kulk, Tallang and Yanakie South for a National Park and on which to establish, when required, Pilot Stations, Lighthouses and other aids to navigation.

Whereas by Section 202 of the Land Act, 1901 it is provided that it shall be lawful for the Governor in Council or the Board of Land and Works to appoint and remove any number of persons, not less than three, or any Municipal Council, or the governing body of any Corporation to be a Committee of Management of any specified Crown land reserved either temporarily or permanently for any of the purposes set out in Section 10 of the Land Act, 1901 and not conveyed to or vested in trustees : Now, therefore, the Board of Land and Works doth hereby appoint the Honbl. Charles Carty-Salmon, M.P., Thomas Sargeant Hall, Alfred James Ewart, Frederick Race Godfrey, Joseph Anderson Panton, Arthur Herbert Evelyn Mattingley, Frederick O’Dee, Walter Baldwin Spencer, Charles William McLean, William Thorn and Augustus Albert Peverill to be a committee of management of the land permanently reserved by Order in Council of 25th February, 1905, as a site for a national park in the Parishes of Beek Beek, Warreen, Kulk and Tallang and of the land permanently reserved by Order in Council of 18th August, 1908 as a site for a national park and for sites on which to establish when required Pilot Stations, Lighthouses and other aids to navigation, in the Township of Seaforth and the Parishes of Beek Beek, Warreen, Kulk, Tallang and Yanakie South.”

(Signed) J.E Mackey, President.

J.W. Skene, Member.

(Dated) 18th August 1908.

So, in these few words, the area to be managed and the names of those who were entrusted with the task of its management were made known.

Walter Baldwin Spencer, C.M.G., M.A., F.R.S. – later to be invested K.C.M.G. – Professor of Biology at the University of Melbourne, had been a leading figure in the campaign for the dedication of the national park. Like his predecessor at the University, Sir Frederick McCoy, he was closely associated with the scientific societies of the time and had been President of the Field Naturalists’ Club of Victoria in the years 1891–93 and again in 1895–97.



Prof. Walter Baldwin Spencer, scientist and chairman of Wilsons Promontory NP Committee of Management in the early 20th century.

Photo courtesy Historic Places, Department of Sustainability and Environment, Victoria

For many years he took an active part in the management of the Club. He was the honorary Director of the National Museum. The Curator of the Zoological Collection at that institution was J.A. Kershaw, F.E.S., C.M.Z.S. who was, in fact, what would now be called the Assistant Director. When Spencer retired Kershaw became Director of the Museum.

At its first meeting, presided over by A.J. Ewart, D.Sc., Professor of Botany at the University, the Committee of Management elected a chairman and a treasurer and appointed an honorary secretary. Spencer was chosen as Chairman and he held that office up to the time of his death at the age of 69 in South Patagonia in July 1929.

The Hon. Charles Carty-Salmon, member (and later to become Speaker) of the House of Representatives, President of the Australian Natives Association and for some years a member of its Board of Directors, was appointed to represent that Association.

The A.N.A. had played a prominent part in the deputations and political discussions which preceded the establishment of the Park – a part it shared with the Royal Society of Victoria, which Dr T.S. Hall was appointed to represent.





Field naturalists and pack horses heading for Darby River along the beach near Cotters Lake, 1905.  
Photo courtesy Historic Places, Department of Sustainability and Environment, Victoria

Hall, too, was a member and, during the years 1901–3 had been President, of the F.N.C.V.. He died suddenly in December, 1915.

Carty-Salmon died in September, 1917.

Ewart represented the F.N.C.V. and became its President in 1909–10. He remained a member of the Committee of Management during his lifetime. On the death of Spencer he became its Chairman, a post he occupied until he himself died in September 1937.

A.H.E. Mattingley, C.M.Z.S. was an officer of the Department of Trade and Customs which at the time of his appointment to the Committee was a State Department, but his appointment as a member of the Committee was designed to give representation to the Australian Ornithologists' Union, of which he was a foundation member. He was also a member of the F.N.C.V. which he had joined in 1895.

His long association with the Victorian natural history societies and his intimate knowledge of the Victorian scene led to his being recognised in the Lands Department as a valued advisor on matters affecting national parks. In later years he was simultaneously a member of the Committee of Management of Wyperfeld National Park.

His death in October 1950 terminated more than 42 years of continuous membership of the Committee of Management of Wilsons Promontory National Park.

Both W. Thorn and A.A. Peverill were also public servants—Thorn a district surveyor in the Mines Department (he later became Chief Draftsman in the Lands Department) and Peverill a member of the Closer Settlement Board and thus an officer of

the Lands Department. Each continued to represent departmental interests up to the time of his retirement from the Service.

Peverill was elected Treasurer of the Committee and continued in that office until shortly before his death in April 1930. For a number of years he also represented the Department on the Committee of Management of Mount Buffalo National Park and of Studley Park. He was at one time President of the A.N.A..

Thorn, who died in February 1933, was a member of the F.N.C.V. for more than thirty years. He retired from the public service in 1928 and, although he remained a member of the Committee, from that time he was no longer regarded as qualified to represent the Department. On their retirement from the Service both he and Peverill were, in fact, requested by the Secretary for Lands to resign from the Committee, but their fellow members asked that they be permitted to remain. The matter of their resignations was not pressed.

F.R. Godfrey was also a member of the F.N.C.V. and, in 1904, President of the Zoological and Acclimatization Society of Victoria, which he was appointed to represent. However, he was aged 62 at the time of his appointment and served on the Committee for little more than eighteen months. He died in 1910. In earlier years he had the distinction of being a friend of John Gould, the bird man.

His death created the first vacancy, and towards the end of October 1910, Dudley Le Souef, Director of the Zoological Gardens, which was operated by the Zoological Society, was appointed in his stead. Some of the fauna introduced into the Park in the early years



Field naturalist group at the Prom, 1920s.

Photo courtesy Historic Places, Department of Sustainability and Environment, Victoria

was obtained through the good offices of Le Souef, who remained a member of the Committee until he died in September 1923.

C.W. McLean was an engineer in the Ports and Harbours Branch of the State Department of Trade and Customs and, evidently, was appointed to represent that Department, which had an interest in the Promontory by virtue of the fact that the Park included several reserves “for pilot stations, lighthouses and other aids to navigation”. He was still a member up to the time of this death in January 1933 although he had long since retired from the public service. His contacts with the marine fraternity were of some value to the Committee. Through him they were enabled, on occasion, to use the services of the lighthouse supply ship *Lady Loch* for transport of official visitors to the Park and, when the project for purchasing a motor launch was being examined, McLean’s advice was sought. His report on *Jessie* was so favourable that she was duly bought for £136 in 1915. Unfortunately, however, no one could get the motor to work—not even the engineers and mechanics of the Marine Branch. The Committee was eventually obliged to purchase another engine. Once they got *Jessie* operational she gave good service for sixteen years. She was sold for about £70 to a satisfied customer in May 1930.

F. O’Dee, the then President of the Piscatorial Council of Victoria, was appointed to represent that body and this he continued to do for more than 23 years. When he died in December 1931, Kershaw advised the Secretary for Lands that “as the streams of the Park were not regarded by the Committee of Management as suitable for the introduction of native fishes it did not seem desirable that the Piscatorial Council should continue to be represented on the Committee.”

Wilfred Agar, M.A., D.Sc., F.R.S., Professor of Zoology at the University of Melbourne and, at the time, President of the Royal Society of Victoria, was nominated in his stead. He was duly appointed in April “to represent Australia’s leading scientific society”.

J.A. Panton was well known as a police magistrate. At the time of his appointment he was President of the Royal Geographical Society. He died in December 1914.

Finally, there was J.A. Kershaw, F.E.S., and later C.M.Z.S.. Kershaw was never officially “gazetted” as a member of the Committee of Management although, at its first meeting, he was appointed as honorary secretary by the Committee itself.

He had been secretary to the conferences of the combined scientific societies during the years in which they had campaigned for the dedication of Wilsons

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Promontory as a national park. He also acted as secretary of the Wilson's Promontory Committee which had come into being at the public meeting held in the Melbourne Town Hall in 1904, and consequently was well known to those who had interested themselves in the campaign. His position at the Museum gave him certain advantages which would have been denied to most others and, of course, he was acquainted with the members of the Committee by virtue of their common affiliations.

He continued as secretary of the Committee up to the time of his death in February 1946—almost 38 years in all, and during that time he held office in a number of Melbourne's scientific societies, including as President of the F.N.C.V. from 1913 to 1915 and of the Royal Society in 1918.

In 1911 Spencer sought his appointment as a member of the Committee, but the request was refused at the direction of the Minister of Lands, who considered there were already too many members on it. In his opinion, membership of the Committee should be limited to seven, but the decision appears to have made little difference to its operations. Members came and went but continuity of policy was assured. The honorary secretary remained to outlive all but one of the original team – Arthur Mattingley.

It was not long before the urbane Kershaw became virtual manager of the Park. He was sometimes granted an honorarium but, generally speaking, funds were rarely buoyant enough to permit any excess of generosity.

Those who had but brief contact with Kershaw described him as a cold, humourless man, but his close associates on the Committee, even if they too may have thought so, were content to let him direct affairs—something he did very effectively and efficiently.

The Committee had little precedent to guide it in its task if managing a wildlife refuge and scenic area.

The national park concept was still, in the early 1900s, something of a novelty, and wildlife management a matter of but limited public interest. Policy and practice were things to be established.

Most of the members were interested, even specialists, in one or another field of natural science and natural history, and hence it was a foregone conclusion that the management of the Park would be strongly biased in favour of nature protection and wildlife conservation. The Committee, nevertheless, did not lose sight of the important but secondary function of the Park as a tourist resort, a place wherein the public at large would be free to wander and seek to understand and appreciate something of the wonder of unspoiled nature.

The first Committee was appointed for no set term. In those Edwardian days life was, perhaps, a more leisurely affair than it is in these modern times and there was no reason to suppose that the men who accepted the task of managing the State's first big national park would over-exert themselves or maintain their first glorious enthusiasm long enough to become a nuisance to the Government. Should interest or enthusiasm wane the Committee could be allowed to die out and so pave the way for reversion of the Park to its former more lucrative usage. That was what had happened at Tower Hill near Koroit.

That scenic wonderland and world famous geological monument became Victoria's first national park—a place actually dedicated as a permanent public reserve by special Act of Parliament in 1892—sixteen years before Wilson's Promontory became a national park. Unfortunately its dedication came about thirty years too late. By the time the Act was passed much of the glory of its scenery had vanished before the onslaught of the fires, axes and guns of the early settlers. However, the Government of the day dutifully sponsored an act to ensure its reservation and appointed a Committee of Management to function in perpetuity—the Council of the Borough of Koroit.

Each successive panel of councillors knew, and probably cared, less and less about the significance of its charge until finally its identity as a national park became overshadowed by its fame as a site for quarrying road metal and as a leasehold cattle run. After almost seventy years as a neglected, abused and, by most, forgotten national park, the Act was repealed. The old volcano is now a game reserve under the control and management of the Fisheries and Wildlife Department.

A similar fate might have befallen Wilsons Promontory National Park had its Committee of Management been chosen differently. By good fortune the leading men on the panel were almost all dedicated nature conservationists who knew they had the confidence and, indeed, the active support of the scientific bodies they were appointed to represent.

It was generally considered that, so long as the system of direct representation endured, the views of those citizens who, through their scientific organisations, had nurtured the idea of the national park as a nature conservation reserve and wildlife sanctuary, would be heard and understood.

As time went on, though, the situation gradually changed and one by one the allied societies became, so to say, disenfranchised. Those responsible for the initial appointment could scarcely have anticipated the longevity of the appointees. The "dying out" process took over forty years, a circumstance which





Area along Sealers Cove track after a bushfire, c.1930s.

Photo courtesy Historic Places, Department of Sustainability and Environment, Victoria

presented the Lands Department with a succession of problems, not the least of which was that of keeping the Committee from becoming something in the nature of an exclusive club.

The Minister's decision in 1914 to limit the number of members to seven could not be made effective until 1923. Le Souef's death in that year left a vacancy which could not be filled without disregarding the instruction but Peverill's continuance on the Committee after his retirement as an official of the Lands Department required that something be done to restore the Departmental representation to its original level. Accordingly, the Secretary for Lands and Director of Land Settlement, W. McIver, was appointed in January 1929. Six months later Sir Baldwin Spencer died, reducing the Committee to the stipulated maximum of seven members – not counting the honorary secretary.

McIver had been a member for less than two years when he too died, and in December 1930 his place as a nominee of the Lands Department was taken by W.J. Northey, the Melbourne District Lands Officer.

As at December 1964 Mr Northey was still a member although he has long since retired from the Department. He succeeded Peverill as Treasurer and,

on the death of Professor Ewart in 1937, he became the Committee's Chairman, an office which he occupied for more than a quarter of a century.

When Peverill died early in 1931 after more than twenty-two years of service, the vacancy was filled, in the face of the Committee's recommendation of someone else, by the appointment of a Melbourne dentist, George Finlay. He had been at one time the general secretary of the Australasian Ornithologists' Union and a member of the Bird Observers' Club and, later, became a trustee of the National Museum. His appointment, which was made in response to his personal application, dated from September 1931 and, although resident in England since 1959, he was, at the time of writing these notes, a member of the Committee several years later.

The next original member to go was O'Dee who, as already mentioned, died later in 1931. His death was followed by that of Thorn in February 1932. His death made it possible for the Secretary for Lands to restore his Department's representational strength to the desired number by appointing Evan Luly.

McLean, too, died about this time and his place was taken by Dr L.J. Clendinnan, a radiologist who, like



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Finlay, had been kind enough to offer his services as a member. Clendinnan's recreations included a study of the Sherbrooke lyrebirds.

In view of the secretary's dedication to the idea of establishing these unique birds in the Park, this interest in them appeared to be a sufficiently good reason for having him on the Committee. He and Luly were both appointed in April 1933. Clendinnan died in 1953 and thus served on the Committee for twenty years. No lyrebirds were introduced during this time.

Luly eventually succeeded his departmental colleague Northey as Treasurer, an office which he retained until he voluntarily retired from the Committee in March 1954 with almost twenty-one years of service to his credit.

Ewart was the next original member to pass on. His death closed 29 years of continuous membership.

In 1936 he resigned from the Field Naturalists' Club after a disagreement over a matter which at the time must have seemed important enough to persuade the club that it would be better represented on the Committee of Management of the Park by some other nominee. Ewart refused to withdraw in favour of anyone else and he adroitly dodged further embarrassment by announcing that the Committee, by its own decision, had long since abandoned the principle of representation of individual organisations and hence he could see no reason why he should make way for a Club successor because he in fact no longer represented the Club and had not represented it for some years past! He had merely neglected to advise his sponsors.

The decision referred to by the Professor must have been made subsequent to the appointment of Professor Agar about four years earlier for, on that occasion, Kershaw wrote to the Royal Society of Victoria to congratulate it on having secured the honour of appointment of its President to represent the Society on the Committee of Management.

In point of fact it was the last of such appointment. Later vacancies were filled either by men appointed to represent some government departmental interest or public institution or by an individual who was expected to bring to the Committee some special talent which would be likely to serve the interest of park management.

Although in the years that followed the F.N.C.V., in common with its associated private organisations, had no officially recognised spokesman on the Committee of Management of the Park they had caused to be created, it continued to exert some influence through those of its members who happened to be appointed to the Committee from time to time. That link was severed in 1957 when Crosbie Morrison retired to take

up his duties in the newly established post of Director of National Parks.

With Ewart's death the Committee lost not only an original member but, as well, its botanical authority. The F.N.C.V. asked to be permitted to nominate a successor but apparently, on the advice of Kershaw, the appointment went to an engineer in the person of Colonel N.C. Harris, D.S.O., M.C., M.Sc., A.M.I.E. (Aust.) Commissioner of Railways. His appointment dated from November 1937 and endured for over 23 years. He retired in April 1961.

Kershaw no doubt gave the advice on the ground that natural history interests were adequately represented by Mattingley and himself. Zoology was catered for by Agar and himself, Ornithology by Mattingley and Finlay and, furthermore, two members—Mattingley and himself—were members of the Field Naturalists' Club and Agar and he were members of the Royal Society of Victoria.

Oddly enough, the appointment of someone conversant with ecology, geology or physiography seems not to have occurred to those who sought some sort of balance in the distribution of talents or interest among the personnel of the Committee.

In the thirtieth year of its existence the Committee comprised W.J. Northey, Chairman; E. Luly, Treasurer;—both officers of the Lands Department—A.H.E. Mattingley—an original member who still was regarded, by the Ornithologists' Union at any rate, as representing that organisation: G. Finlay, dentist and one-time bird observer; Professor W. Agar, zoologist; L.J. Clendinnan, medical practitioner, radiologist and student of the life history of lyrebirds; N.C. Harris, engineer and Commissioner of Railways; and of course, Honorary Secretary J.A. Kershaw.

The Promontory is part of the Shire of South Gippsland and, naturally enough, the residents of the districts within that Shire took more than the average amount of interest in the developments which were taking place within the Park.

The farming community had a pecuniary interest in it inasmuch as some of them regularly tendered for grazing rights in the Park.

The growing tourist traffic appealed to the traders as a source of income and therefore something which could be regarded as an investment. A proportion of every penny spent by a visitor to the Promontory remained in the Shire and, to that extent, it was good business to encourage that kind of traffic.

From the earliest years the local Progress Associations had recommended developments of various kinds, among them a government chalet near Mount Singapore and later at the foot of the Vereker



Wilsons Promontory NP boundary fence, c.1920.

Photo courtesy Historic Places, Department of Sustainability and Environment, Victoria

Range. They supported the Committee in its pleas for finance to build an overland track to the Park and, when that objective was realised, to build a better one. Sometimes, according to the temper of the times, a Progress Association would be at loggerheads with the Committee over a matter of policy but the Committee's views always prevailed. It took over thirty years to convince the Lands Department that it might be worth including on the Committee a spokesman for local interests but, having been convinced, the new policy was put into effect by the appointment of the Hon. Herbert Hyland, M.L.A.

Hyland was, at the time, parliamentary representative of the electorate which included the national park. His appointment in November 1940 was made possible by the retirement of Professor Agar in April 1939. He remained on the committee until April 1949, and upon his retirement J.G Jones, a Councillor of the Shire of South Gippsland, took his place. Jones, a butcher of Foster, was familiar enough with some of the problems of management of the Park. He had grazed cattle there some twenty years earlier.

He retired from municipal affairs late in 1959 but continued, in a private capacity, as a member of the Committee until 1965. His place, as the Shire's official representative, was taken by Cr. J.H. McDonald who functioned in that capacity until he ceased to represent the South Gippsland Council.

The Committee during the war years had little to do and what had to be done was mostly arranged by

Kershaw with the assistance of the Chairman (Northey) and the Treasurer (Luly) but the post war years brought with them problems and worries of a novel kind.

The five-year occupation of the Promontory by units of the Australian Military Forces produced some of them and, so far as the general public was concerned, the most important one was that of restoring the place to a condition which would permit it to be used once again as a national park.

It passed back to the control of the Committee on the 1st February, 1946. On the 17th February, Kershaw, after a long spell of ill health, died.

Until his successor, H.J. Griffin—an officer of the Lands Department—was appointed in the following July the Treasurer, Evan Luly carried on.

The Committee set its mind to making the best use of what the army had left behind and, fortified with about £2,400 [\$4,800] compensation received from the Commonwealth, it evolved the idea of a "village settlement" at Tidal River. The huts, stables and other buildings of the wartime base camp were remodelled and brought to a standard acceptable to holiday-makers. Fortunately for all concerned the acceptable standard was not impossibly high, mainly because most people had been conditioned by several years of partial austerity. They were just commencing to readjust themselves to unrationed food, clothes and petrol and the day when they would want to spend their holidays basking in the luxury of a million pound hotel was yet to come.

In the spring of 1947 the Committee reopened the Park to campers and caravanners and, two years later, a terrace of cabins was ready for occupation by those who preferred cabins to tents. The question of the survival of the Park's wildlife was a matter of some public moment but the committee was not very happily situated to make an authoritative assessment of what actually had survived the occupation by the Commandos. Mattingley was the only naturalist on the Committee but he was now much too old to carry out a useful tour of inspection. However, C. W. Brazenor, the mammalogist at the Museum, was available, and in July 1948 he accepted appointment as an additional member of the panel.

In February 1950, he led a team of scientific investigators who spent a fortnight studying the fauna, flora and tourist facilities of the Park. Their report rather confirmed the generally expressed view that the Park was in need of a measure of rehabilitation and, as opportunity occurred, new members were brought on to the Committee to infuse it with some new ideas or, possibly, to break the old traditions and make it a little easier to adjust its thinking to meet the demands of a generation of people eager for the kind of holiday the Promontory could well provide.

In June 1949 the well-known naturalist Phillip Crosbie Morrison, a Trustee of the National Museum, became a member. In February of the following year E. R. Torbet of the Forests Commission joined the panel, and in December 1950 the Manager of the Government Tourist Bureau (W. T. McConnell) was appointed to fill the vacancy created by the death of Arthur Mattingley—the last of the original members.

Fires in the Park had always been a problem and, doubtless, it was hoped that Torbet—a specialist in fire prevention and fire control measures—would provide the guidance the Committee needed. There were some who believed that it was not so much advice that was needed but funds, to put into effect the fire protection measures already widely accepted by most authorities. Sad to say, the Park was burned by one of the biggest fires in its history during Torbet's term of office. He died in 1956 and his place was taken by R. T. Seaton, the Forests Commission's new Fire Protection Officer.

The death of Clendinnen early in 1954 caused a vacancy which was filled by the appointment, in April 1954, of Balcombe Quick, a Melbourne surgeon who, presumably, was to be accepted as the Committee's adviser on the public health aspect of camp sites of the kind which was fast developing at Tidal River.

In the following October L. B. Mercer took Luly's place as the nominee of the Lands Department. By now it had become an established practice for the Committee's secretary to be an officer of the Lands

Department so that, when Griffin transferred to another Department, in September 1948 his place was taken by W. R. Harris who, after almost three years in office, was succeeded by A. C. Allen. He remained in the position until May 1953 and was followed by W. W. Walsh. L. Gibney succeeded him, and two and a half years later, in August 1955, E. Kennedy took over the duties. None of these men was able to exercise the same authority as Kershaw. The structure of the Committee had evolved to a state where its Secretary was no longer the virtual managing director of the Park. Although successive secretaries since Kershaw's day have functioned for relatively short periods, the record for brevity of membership of the Committee is held by M.J. Harkings who came on to it in March 1957 to represent the Government Tourist Bureau. Eight months later he resigned as a consequence of his becoming the Bureau's nominee on the then recently created National Parks Authority. G. Hindle, the then manager of the Bureau took his place on the Committee.

The National Parks Authority [was] dominated by government departments, and it soon established a policy whereby departmental interests were represented on the Committees of Management of the several national parks which it controlled. It endorsed the principle of representing local interests as well and it even conceded the value of including individuals as 'private' members — people who had no official status but who were regarded as capable of contributing something of value towards the management of a national park.

When the Committee of Management of Wilsons Promontory National Park finally agreed to allow itself to be governed by the National Parks Authority several new appointments were made.

The 1914 directive about limiting the number of members to from five to seven no longer applied. The Committee could be as large or small as the Authority considered necessary. At the same time an important new principle was adopted. Henceforth, appointments were to be for terms of three years.

In August 1960 J.G. McDonald, Councillor of the Shire of South Gippsland, was appointed in fulfilment of the policy of having an official representative of local interests. His predecessor as the Council's nominee, J.G. Jones, remained as a "private member". Jack Jones, now in his 80s, had roamed the Promontory since boyhood and consequently was credited with knowing as much about the topography of the place as any living person. Being a firm believer in what had come to be called "controlled burning" his views on fire protection measures did not entirely coincide with those of his colleagues.

L.B. Mercer continued as the nominee of the Lands

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Department while E. Kennedy of the same department remained as Secretary.

In recognition of his long service to the Committee, the Chairman W. J. Northey, although since May 1946 no longer an officer of the Department, was reappointed and continued as a private member. George Finlay, for the same reason, was retained as a nominal member "on leave of absence". Norman Harris was reappointed for the same reason, too, although he had some time ago retired from the Railways Commission. When he eventually withdrew from the Committee his place was taken by K.G. Hardcastle in July 1961. He was an architect to whom the old Committee had been much indebted for past architectural services. He came onto the panel as a private member.

Balcombe Quick, the surgeon, and Charles Brazenor (who eventually succeeded to the Directorship of the National Museum) were retained as members, the latter as the nominee of the Trustees of the Museum and the former as a private member. R.T. Smeaton continued as the nominee of the Forests Commission and George Hindle, whose appointment was recommended in November 1957, was confirmed as the nominee of the Tourist Bureau in October 1960. At the same time two new appointments were made — J. McNally, M.Sc., Senior Biologist of the Department of Fisheries and Wildlife as the nominee of that Department, and Roy Cooper, a company accountant better known to naturalists as an ornithologist, as a private member.

For some time the Department of Fisheries and Wildlife had no official representation because McNally succeeded Brazenor as Director of the Museum when he retired in 1962, but this situation was rectified in mid-1963 by the appointment of J.K. Dempster to represent the Department. The official nominees or representatives (and the rather thorny problem of whether they were to be accepted as the one or the other remained unresolved) endured as such only so long as they continued as officers of the nominating department or council, as the case may be. If the Authority regarded an official nominee as indispensable it was free to reappoint him as a private member the moment he severed his connection with the nominating body — government department or municipal council — and it did not have to include departmental nominees if it did not want to do so. However, in view of the composition of the Authority, it was highly unlikely that departmental interests were ever overlooked when the triennial appointments came up for review.

This record of membership of the Committee of Management of Wilsons Promontory National Park during its existence over more than half a century has brought to attention a number of interesting points which provide material for a discussion of the merits

and demerits of national park management as we know it.

No one will disagree with the proposition that if we are to have national parks they should be administered to the best possible advantage of the whole community. Some difficulty arises when we attempt to determine what that best possible advantage is. It is, in fact, something largely speculative. What is best today is not necessarily best tomorrow.

Inevitably it falls to the lot of somebody to decide what is best and the decision may or may not please the majority.

In 1908 the public was persuaded that Wilsons Promontory should be a National Park dedicated with the prime object of ensuring the protection and preservation of the indigenous plants and animals of not only the State of Victoria but, indeed, of the whole continent and Tasmania. One can be sure that there were many who appreciated the absurdity of the proposition, but there it was. That was what the public had been persuaded to want.

The Committee was expected to manage the Park in such a way that this could be done. Kershaw, with the acquiescence of the Committee, persisted relentlessly in introducing non-endemic species into the Park with positive results which are now hardly worth mentioning. An expensive fence was built to keep them in and keep out the unwanted exotic species but, even while it remained in good repair, it failed to serve its purpose. It had four gates through which the public might enter under permit, but it was no barrier to starlings, blackbirds and sparrows nor to anything else that could fly. Nor did it stop the entry of four-legged beasts that chose to swim or paddle across the mud flats of the South West Corner when the tide was out. The Park eventually acquired its complement of rabbits, foxes, cats, hares, deer, goats, wild dogs and even, it is said, pigs.

Cattlemen with their horses and dogs were a privileged section of the community. For a small charge they could come and go as they wished. In fact, for many years, the Park was little more than a cattle ranch, a National Park approved by the people of the region only because its resources could supplement their incomes. Some of their employees and men of like inclination regarded the place as a "sportsman's paradise", a place where the national park regulations meant nothing so long as the park ranger was not in the vicinity.

The panel of amateur managers, more than 200 kilometres from the place they were managing, had little hope of making much progress but, in view of the attitude of so many of the local folk towards the Park, one shudders to contemplate what might have



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happened had those interests been vouchsafed full control of its management.

It took the Committee thirty or forty years to learn how to manage a big nature conservation reserve and it will probably take another thirty or forty years before that knowledge will be properly applied. The last Committee of Management was in a far happier position than any of its predecessors because it is expected to do no more than manage the place in accordance with a policy determined for it by a higher authority, and that authority, in formulating its policy, could if it so desired avoid the mistakes of the past and profit by whatever successes there might have been.

The management of nature conservation reserves is now recognised as a highly complex job. Gone are the days when it was believed that all that was necessary was to colonise the places with native animals and plants and so arrange things that the people could come and see them living their carefree lives amidst natural surroundings. Nature doesn't work that way.

Today it is realised that if man is to derive the maximum benefit from such possessions they must be managed in such a way as to ensure that he is the master.

It is easy enough to criticise the Committee of Management for past deficiencies and shortcomings but who could have done much better? The members were guided in their approach to the problems which arose from time to time by the knowledge available to them and by the experience they themselves had gained. Perhaps it was not good that the appointments should have been for life because it is difficult to break lifelong habits of thinking, difficult to accept new ideas and easy to make the occasional newcomer conform to established, even if unsound, practices.

The consensus of opinion of those competent to judge was that a vermin-proof fence across the Yanakie Isthmus was essential. Accordingly, a fence was built. It was not until the fence was almost completely destroyed after thirty years of existence that the Committee began to accept an opinion that all it had really done had been to make easier the task of controlling cattle grazing within the Park. It certainly had failed to prevent the entry of undesirable animals.

The Committee set out to encourage people to visit the Park and applied itself to this task with all the resources it could command. It succeeded so well in doing this that now the problem is how to divert the stream of visitors to other places.

It acquiesced in a scheme for establishing a plantation of exotic trees — mostly pines — in the Park. It was not its fault that the place is not now overrun with oaks, elms, poplars and pines. In attempting to solve one problem it almost invariably created another one.

It busied itself with the problem of erosion by introducing alien elements as sand-binders — Marram, Buffalo, Ryecorn and, worst of all, Kikuyu grasses— without considering the ecological disadvantages which could and in fact did follow, without taking due notice of the fact that the Park was the natural habitat of half a dozen indigenous sand-binders. It will be an impossible job to rid the place of kikuyu!

The Committee's shortcomings have been generally excused on the grounds that the financial support given it from public funds was always at a bare subsistence level — rarely exceeding five or six hundred pounds a year. They simply did not have the money to put into effect any grand plans for development which, as it happens, was just as well. Wilsons Promontory is in process of development as a tourist resort but it should never be forgotten that it is something more than that.

The Committee never did have any practicable plan for preventing or even suppressing bushfires — but who did? It was not until the fires of summer 1939 ravaged more than half of the entire State of Victoria that anyone began to study the problem scientifically. The catastrophes which the Committee were powerless or ill-equipped to prevent or even ameliorate were the underlying reason for the evolutionary changes in its structure.

At the time of its inception the advice and support of the scientific societies and other private organisations its members were intended to represent would have been invaluable, but, as the Committee gained experience, it came to depend less and less on those resources until finally it dissociated itself from them entirely. It began to look for advice and assistance from senior departmental officials — to those who could deal with the technicalities of road, track and bridge construction, design buildings, organise tourist traffic and so on. It was much more convenient to have such people at hand on the Committee than to have to interview or write to them whenever some specialist problem arose.

So it has come about that the real management of the Park became the concern of the seven departments represented on the National Parks Authority — Treasury, Lands, Public Works, Forests Commission, Fisheries and Wildlife, Soil Conservation authority and the Government Tourist Bureau. The Park was to be managed in the way prescribed by those government departments and instrumentalities and detached observers watched with much interest the developments that followed as a consequence of this prescription.

## Chapter 7: Biological Studies of the Prom – and Fires

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The biological survey of 1905 had provided a wealth of information about the natural resources of the Promontory but the Committee of Management was well aware that there was ample scope for further investigation. Accordingly, two botanists from the National Herbarium and Botanic Garden—J. W. Audas and H. P. R. St John—were commissioned to make a systematic study of the vegetation of the park and, in September 1908, the first of a series of expeditions was commenced.

Both men were regarded as competent naturalists and their reports contained much of general interest as well as their observations on the vegetation. The tally of 182 different species of plant recorded during the 1905 survey was increased by Audas and St. John to 364. All of the additions were located in the south and south-west sector, which was the portion they first examined.

Again no foxes, rabbits or lyrebirds were seen, although the two men were convinced that the lyrebird did in fact inhabit the gullies of Mount Latrobe.

The dingo, so abundant 40 or 50 years earlier, had apparently gone altogether—supplanted by the wild dog which they considered to be a much greater pest than the dingo was ever likely to have been. Although Sambar Deer were reputed to be on the Promontory they saw only the diminutive Hog Deer and this animal was believed to be there in only small numbers.

By way of contrast they remarked on the huge flocks of Black Swans on Shallow Inlet (which was not within the boundaries of the Park)—thousands of them. Several bird men were disbelieving. Hundreds were credible but not thousands. However, both Shallow Inlet and Corner Basin are favoured haunts of swans. During the warmer months the shallow waters of these inlets are among the best feeding grounds to be found on the Victorian coast as the water birds well know.

St John added twelve more birds to the 1905 tally and reported the sighting of koalas, wombats, echidnas and black-tailed wallabies.

In October 1909 the second official botanical survey was undertaken. On this occasion Audas and St John were joined by Dr C. S. Sutton, a well known Melbourne physician whose recreation (and, in later years, be it added, preoccupation) was botany. The party examined the eastern and northern portions of the Park around about Sealers and Refuge Coves, the Singapore Peninsula, Barry's Creek, Mount Vereker and the Darby River.

Their report enumerated 135 plants additional to the species already recorded. Among them was the Wedge Fern, a plant never before found in Victoria, which they discovered in a gully at the headwaters of Chinamans Creek and Barrys Creek. Curiously enough this fern has,

to this day, never been found in any other part of the State.

During the construction of the fire access track to Five Mile Beach some years ago, a stand of Lilly Pillies was located in a gully of the headwaters of one of the tributaries of Barrys Creek. Miraculously, the gully has escaped the ravages of a succession of fires which have invaded this part of the Park and some enormous Messmates, Blackwoods and Lilly Pillies commingle in all their magnificence. This was the gully where Audas, St John and Sutton found the Wedge Fern. Even though it may lack the fern dell charm of the more renowned Lilly Pilly Gully, this gully is a gem to be valued for its rarity alone.

The three botanists were hardly enthusiastic about the grazing cattle which they saw on the plains but, for the reason mentioned above, it was the policy of the Committee of Management to permit the continuance of such grazing under licence, and this policy was to continue unchanged for a long time to come.

The presence of the 42 alien plants seen by the collectors (and this number included three 'proclaimed' weeds) was ascribed by them to the cattle.

Rabbits still had not reached the Park, possibly because the Strzelecki and Hoddle farmers were able to provide adequately for the steadily expanding population of these animals on their own holdings. Their arrival in the Park would be but a question of time. Perhaps the inevitable invasion would be halted by the fence the Committee hoped to build.

The facility with which the botanists (and others) moved about on the Promontory seems quite incredible today. In their time there were serviceable tracks. The big fires of 1907–08 had cleared away much of the undergrowth and the grazing cattle had kept it from becoming too rank. On Singapore Peninsula in particular, where now one's rate of progress on foot might be from half to one mile an hour, overland travel was easy. Arnie Smith of Port Welshpool claims to have once walked barefoot from Mount Hunter to Mount Singapore. Now one would need to be not only well shod but preceded by a bulldozer.

When Black surveyed the Peninsula he caused a substantial granite cairn to be erected on the summit of Mount Singapore and the cairn was a favourite picnic spot for many following years. It still remains but is scarcely visited now unless by seasoned bushwalkers.

The Committee of Management was fully alive to the advantages to be gained by buffering the Park against undesirable forms of human activity, but it failed to gain any change in the status of either the excluded Mount Hunter–Seaforth area of the Peninsula or the southern end of the Yanakie Isthmus. It did, however, persuade the Lands Department to recommend to the Minister



Field Naturalists Club of Victoria members at Bull Plain (Vereker Range) during their 1912 excursion to Wilsons Promontory.  
Photo courtesy Historic Places, Department of Sustainability and Environment, Victoria

that a number of the islands near the shores of the Promontory be brought within its control.

Towards the end of 1909 notice was given in the Victoria Gazette of the intention to permanently reserve for national park purposes Shellback Island, Norman Island, the Anser Islands, Wattle Island, Rabbit Island, Bennison Island, Granite Islands and Do Boy [Doughboy] Island. After a decent interval of almost seven years the intention was realised and on page 2341 of the Gazette of 21 June 1916 there appeared a notice to the effect that the above-mentioned several islands were permanently reserved from sale by an Order in Council made on 22 November 1909. Surely someone must have forgotten to have the Order published in 1909!

It will be recalled that in November 1898 the greater part of the Promontory had been gazetted as a sanctuary for native fauna in anticipation of its proclamation as a permanently reserved national park. Some years earlier (in 1890) the Game Act had been proclaimed and it provided for the declaration of native game reserves which would be subject to some kind of oversight by departmental inspectors.

The Committee of Management possessed no powers under this Act and neither it nor its employees had much chance of stamping out “poaching” or illegal shooting in the Park. It therefore sought to have the National Park brought within the scope of the Game Act so that its status as a fauna sanctuary might be recognised and properly policed. This

recommendation, too, was agreed to and in 1910 the Gazette of 7 September, page 4118, carried a notice to the effect that the whole of Wilsons Promontory National Park within the already defined boundaries, together with that portion of Corner Basin enclosed by a line drawn from Yanakie of Millar’s Landing to Mount Singapore, was proclaimed a Native Game Reserve. The Proclamation included the islands mentioned above and, interestingly enough, the portion of Singapore Peninsula which, at that time was occupied under Miner’s Licence—to wit, the Mount Hunter area.

From that date it became unlawful for anyone to kill or destroy any native game named in the Third Schedule to the 1890 Game Act, and the prohibition applied throughout the whole year. This document was signed by Sir Gibson Carmichael who, in the following month, visited the Park for the famous nature study excursion which is mentioned in the next chapter. He thus saw for himself the place his proclamation concerned.

In this same month, October 1910, Audas and St. John carried out the third and last official botanical survey. This time they revisited Sealers Cove and examined the country inland from Five Mile Beach. Their report added 42 native and eight alien species to the list already recorded for the Park—a list now claimed by them to number more than 600 species of fern and flowering plant. Fifty of them were introduced weeds.

At the time of their visit the big Yellow Stringybarks



Field naturalists in their meal tent during the 1912 excursion.  
Photo courtesy Historic Places, Department of Sustainability and Environment, Victoria

(*Eucalyptus muelleriana*) on the Vereker Range were being felled to provide posts for the “vermin-proof” fence which, at last, was about to be erected.

This fence, although often regarded as defining the boundary of the Park, in fact followed the boundary for a short distance in only two or three places—where it coincided with the eastern boundary of the two blocks 74 and 76 held by the Falls family. Two of the four gates allowed access to the Falls’ blocks while No. 1 gate up near Corner Basin opened into that part of the Park which the Committee of Management used as a mustering paddock and, from time to time, leased to graziers.

During the Second World War the decaying fence fell into irreparable condition and the fire of 1951 destroyed most of what remained of it. However, traces are still to be seen near Corner Basin near the site of the old No. 1 gate. Some of the unburned posts are remarkably well preserved after many years of exposure to the weather—which speaks well for the wisdom of the Committee in choosing Yellow Stringybark for the job.

Because of the present content of introduced exotic fauna it has been thought rather pointless to rebuild it for the purpose it originally served, and successive Committees of Management had chosen to use available funds for more urgent and necessary works within the Park. Then, too, there was always the hope that some of the Parish of Yanakie South might yet be added to the Park when it would be time enough to think of erecting a fence to define the boundary.

In presenting the botanists’ report Professor Ewart mentioned the Committee’s plan to publish a handbook on the national park, a book which, he added, would be

of but temporary usefulness because it was intended that the native flora and fauna from other parts of the Commonwealth were to be liberated with the object of their ultimate acclimatisation within the Park. The handbook never was published but the Committee’s species-conservation program was in full swing by the time the seven-foot high fence had been completed in May 1912.

In its second annual report, published late in 1910, reference was made to the various species of animal already liberated in accordance with the scheme. They included six emus, three lyrebirds, five satin bowerbirds, two grey kangaroos, two rufous-necked wallabies, five wombats, twenty-six possums and two Gunn’s bandicoots. Once the fence was up there would be small chance of the beasts escaping into South Yanakie.

The Christmas holidays of 1912 were the occasion for the second “camp-out” organised by the Field Naturalists’ Club. The participants rambled over a considerable area of territory which, thanks to the efforts of the successive rangers and their assistants, was now endowed with several serviceable tracks.

They were able to explore the environs of Barry’s Creek, Mount Vereker, the Landing, the Darby River and even Sealers Cove.

The Committee of Management (which was well represented at the camp-out) used the occasion to initiate its plant-introduction program. The ostensible purpose of the scheme was to save certain rare or vanishing species from the extinction which was believed to be threatening them elsewhere, but the first choice was hardly a judicious one for it included Golden Wattle, Sunshine Acacia and Mahogany Gum, all of which were and still are common enough in their



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natural Victorian habitats. However, they were not recognised indigenes of the National Park and their presence in it would have been an adornment and preferable to the exotic conifers, planes and birches which had been planted in the Forestry Department's arboretum over at Barry's Creek.

In addition, seeds (from packets purchased at Brunning's shop in Melbourne) were sown here and there along the tracks, in the gullies and valleys and in other likely spots.

There is now no evidence that any of those introductions endured long enough to become an established element of the vegetation of the National Park, but for the purposes of the record they are listed in the chapter on introduced fauna and flora. Should some sharp-eyed rambler—more than seventy years later—find a hitherto unrecorded plant on the Promontory he would be wise to examine this list of introductions. His "find" might be one of them.

The lyrebirds liberated at Sealers Cove twelve months previously were neither seen nor heard. Even to this day the existence of this bird on the Promontory is a matter for argument. If the bird ever was indigenous to the region it is certainly odd that no mention of it was ever made by the pioneers, collectors and observers who roamed the mountains and valleys of the place in the years before its dedication as a national park. In those less enlightened days 'pheasants', as they were called by the bushmen, were commonly shot for the pot and thus they would have been a talking point. In any event, just how the bird could have established itself there without the aid of man or miracle would have been a teasing puzzle. It is a poor flier [sic] and could not possibly have migrated across the waters of Corner Basin or along the Yanakie Isthmus from the distant Hoddle or Strzelecki Ranges where it was abundant enough.

Had its arrival on the Promontory pre-dated the subsidence of the ancient Bunurong mountain range it surely would have survived, as had the mammalian fauna, and even multiplied to a degree which would have exposed it to observation in what seems to be the highly suitable environment which existed at Sealers Cove or in the eastern valleys of Mount Vereker or Mount Latrobe. But, in the later years that followed, no one has been credited with having actually seen the bird although some have reported hearing its characteristic call. If now it is ever authentically recorded no one will be quite sure whether it is an indigene or a descendant of those introduced in and since 1911.

As suggested above, the koala and several other species of mammal must surely have reached the Promontory along a land corridor furnished with sources of food although such a corridor no longer

exists. Surely the lyrebird could have done the same.

Tourist traffic to the Park in those far-off days was limited. Those who did adventure to its scenic domains were mostly walking tourists, naturalists and other scientific ladies and gentlemen who arrived by boat from Port Franklin or Port Welshpool. With the establishment of a camping centre at the Darby River the Vereker Landing place began to suffer neglect and the shelter hut was used mainly by parties bent on exploring Mount Vereker or picnicking on the shores of Corner Basin.

The water supply there was meagre while at the Darby River water was no problem.

The Yanakie South beach track gradually came to be the accepted route to the Park. The gate at the old foot-bridge over the river was the entrance point. The track led from Foster or Fish Creek through Yanakie to the "New Homestead" where it turned west toward Shallow Inlet, traversed some difficult hummocks of shifting sand (which later were made more easily negotiable by laying a corduroy track for the jinkers, traps and buggies then in use), and then debouched on to the ocean beach. A run of about ten kilometres along the hard sands towards the Darby River was not invariably a sheer delight. The smoothness of one's passage was rather a matter of luck. Sometimes, as an aftermath of wind and tide, the sand was left rippled like the surface of a corrugated iron roof and ten kilometres of this kind of corrugation was enough to test the durability of the toughest vehicle, to say nothing of the endurance of its occupants.

Briggs, in the reminiscence of the already mentioned trip by the members of the Melbourne Walking Club, recalled that the beach track was in just that condition on the day his party chose to use it. Spokes began to fall from the wheels of the old buggy which they had engaged for the journey. Finally, one too many fell out and the vehicle collapsed, obliging them to resume their role of walkers—with 40 kg packs!

In the years between 1914 and 1918 the world was engaged in its first grand-scale war and the activities on the Promontory gradually tapered off. It had its regular visitors, and its Committee of Management, as opportunity offered, continued its program of acclimatisation of non-endemic animal species. By 1917, 192 animals had been liberated, a notable one being Woodward's Kangaroo, a somewhat rare species from the north and northwest of Australia, which was brought into the Park in 1916.

In the following year Victoria's only indigenous palm (*Livistona australis*) was planted in Lilly Pilly Gully. Seven years later it was reported to be still flourishing but today there is no sign of it having survived the ravages of fire which descended on that lovely gully some years ago [1951].

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By 1917 the fox was recognised as a well established denizen of the Park although, surprisingly enough, the rabbit was not yet in evidence. A fox had been seen in 1912 and some effort was made to exterminate the beast but, unhappily, without success. It is generally believed that its kind had reached the Park before the fence was built and that the intervening time had been spent in settling-in the less frequented parts of the Park.

Actually the fence would have been no impediment to the animal because it could have crossed from the Yanakie Isthmus into the Park at low tide by traversing the shallows or mud flats at the point where the fence came down to the shore of Corner Basin near the Vereker Landing.

It is not easy to evaluate the impact the importation of the fox into this country has had on the native fauna.

To a large extent the animal has merely replaced the dingo as a controller of populations of the kind of animal both species prey upon.

We are apt to blame the fox for the apparent disappearance of birds and mammals which were once familiar denizens of the countryside but it is but fair to say that man himself has played the major part in the decline of their populations simply by destroying their natural habitat. It would not have been foxes or cats or any other alien animals which brought about the complete eradication of wallabies, bandicoots, phascogales and the rest from the Melbourne City's square mile. They were all there in 1840 because their habitat was then intact. It is an example to ponder when we are invited to consider the future of Wilsons Promontory National Park and, in fact, any of our national parks. "Development" and nature conservation are not altogether compatible.

As a destroyer the fox is not to be despised as a rival to man but its methods lack finesse. It kills for the sheer love of killing—or, at least, so it seems. On several occasions those who have had occasion to study the mutton bird colony on Bennison Island have noticed many mutilated and dead birds. They have formed the opinion that foxes have been responsible for the carnage.

At low tide the island is connected to the Park mainland by mangrove-lined sand and mudflats which foxes can readily cross. Despite these depredations the colony continues to exist.

So far as tourists were concerned the National Park's red letter day came in 1923 when the Darby Chalet was opened for the accommodation of guests. From that time onward the place became a rendezvous for naturalists, sightseers and tourists from all parts of the world and it remained so for almost twenty years until war once more intruded into the tranquillity and charm of Wilsons Promontory.

The F.N.C.V. celebrated the establishment of the chalet by conducting its fourth excursion to the Park during the summer vacation immediately following. It was led by Charles Daley, the well-known teacher, naturalist, essayist, historian and bushwalker, and he continued as leader of what became a regular event in the years that followed. These annual Christmas parties were always something of a treat for most of the other guests who freely mingled with the naturalists and thus had the opportunity of learning much and seeing more than would otherwise have been likely of what the National Park had to offer for the enjoyment of its visitors.

The opening of the Chalet rendered the permit system obsolete for all except campers, and they could obtain their permits from the ranger.

Tourist publicity ensured a steady flow of paying guests who had merely to book at the Government Tourist Bureau which, at the Committee's request, took over this side of the business.

The increased traffic meant greater revenue. It must have almost seemed that the park could be self-supporting what with income from the Chalet lease and grazing licence fees because, when the depression years descended upon the country, the Government discontinued its annual grant.

To ensure that those who entered the Park would be fully aware of its function as a nature conservation area, and that they would be capable of fending for themselves and providing for their own needs and comfort, it had been the practice to authorise entry by permit. These were issued by the Secretary of the Committee of Management—sometimes not without question as to why the applicant wanted to go there. Kershaw had no intention of encouraging visits by shooting parties or by those who had no interest in preserving scenic places.

Residents of the adjacent districts perhaps exempted themselves from the permit system, mainly for the obvious reason that they knew the ranger as well as he knew them. Strangers needed a permit before they could feel free to wander at will within the Park.

In retrospect the permit system seems to have been a little futile. In the early years of existence as a National Park visitors were relatively few and, if they were strangers to the place, would in their own interest have made themselves known to the ranger. Those who were not strangers to it would have known how to avoid the ranger anyway. Forty thousand hectares of territory is a lot of country for one or two rangers to patrol. The system may have discouraged some illicit shooting and other damaging practices but the most serious damage was being perpetrated by the Committee itself – through its grazing policy – and by its inability to



Cattle on beach at the Prom, c.1930.

Photo courtesy Historic Places, Department of Sustainability and Environment, Victoria

supervise the tin mines over on Mount Hunter.

During the era of the Chalet, when visitors began to be numbered in thousands, there would have been much more point in exercising a strict control and extending the control to other than campers, but by this time the rangers had so many other duties that they could hardly be expected to keep an eye on every visitor.

The situation was aggravated by the circumstance that the camping village was about ten kilometres from the point of entry by road and what happened at the Darby River and anywhere between that river and the Singapore Peninsula was nobody's business.

The Christmas vacation of 1919 was the occasion for what was, at that time, a decidedly unusual event.

By now women were sufficiently emancipated to undertake enterprises formerly indulged only by their menfolk. Camping was one of them and a band of female naturalists conceived the idea of a camp-out on the Prom for girls only.

Eleven young ladies – all members of the F.N.C.V. – took part in the adventure which was later described in the Club's journal and magazine.

The occasion was notable for the acquisition of the

koala 'Teddy Dincombe' who subsequently became well known in Melbourne. Teddy was said to have been found motherless and alone outside the Park gate. He was promptly adopted by the girls, brought to Melbourne and, with the special permission of the Chief Inspector of Fisheries and Game, installed in comparative luxury in the spacious garden of a home in Hawthorn. He made several appearances at the Wildflower and Nature Shows staged by the Club and he was, of course, the centre of attraction. The reason given for his more or less benignant durance lay in the opportunity it presented for a study of the selective feeding habits of koalas.

The subsequent history of the little koala, 'Teddy Dincombe' is, so to say, shrouded in mystery but very likely he ended his life in the Melbourne Zoo.

The affair of Teddy resulted in a tightening of the administration of the Game Laws insofar as they affected the National Park and its Committee of Management.

The ranger at the time of the Girls' camp-out was W.J. Cripps, who was shortly after appointed an Honorary Inspector of Fisheries and Game. Armed with the authority of this office he had some measure of control over those who ignored the Game Act either

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within or outside the boundaries of the Park.

During the next few years the Promontory continued to draw to itself the discriminating tourist and visitor.

Whatever its vicissitudes the National Park could always do that. Those who travelled there by the Fish Creek route owe something to the mail contractors who gradually developed a motor transport service from the Creek to the River. The long beach track, later shortened by two or three miles, was in general use up to 1938 when the Country Roads Board completed a gravel surface road from the Yanakie Homestead gate right through to the Darby. In this same year – 1938 – another large bushfire burned through a large area of the Park.

In common with the managing bodies of so many other institutions the National Park Committee operated with some difficulty during the depression years of the early 1930s.

As already mentioned, the Government's annual grant ceased and the Committee was therefore unable to effect much in the way of maintenance and improvement of facilities for tourists.

How it managed at all is something of a mystery. The only sources of revenue available to it – from grazing fees, camping fees, hire of horses and the leasing of the Chalet – would have barely paid a ranger's salary.

The practice of cattle grazing in National Parks has always been controversial – the pros and cons often hotly debated or bitterly argued.

Cattle are blamed for distributing alien weeds, both noxious and otherwise.

They compete, and very effectively too, for the food which in their absence would be available for the herbivorous native fauna – insect, bird and four-footed beast alike – for which the sanctuary was established.

They trample, and often enough destroy, vegetation to a degree which severely affects the prospects of survival of certain species. Their gregarious habits lead to a swift alteration in the soil structure of the pastures on which they graze and to a resultant radical change in the actual composition of the plant communities which inhabit the grazed areas.

In all these respects sheep have an even worse reputation but, to the credit of the Committee of Management, sheep grazing was never at any time permitted as a business, although some of the rangers were allowed to keep a small number for killing.

Finally, the presence of cattle has always been an encouragement to the grazier to carry out pre-summer and late-autumn 'burns' to rid the land of useless native vegetation so that the more valued fodder plants can flourish.

On the other hand, they are valued for the money

they can earn for the licensing authority.

They put to 'good economic use' land which, on the face of it, is simply lying idle.

Not only do these grazing rights contribute to an industry of some value to the State but they ease the lot of cattlemen who, at most times, are struggling against adversity on farms which, as so often managed (even in these enlightened days), are not capable of supporting the number of stock which economic necessity demands must be carried on those farms.

Further, without regular grazing, those rich pastures in the National Park would become so lush in the spring as to constitute a serious fire hazard in the summer. Far better that the grass should be used to fatten cows than that it should go up in smoke with profit to none and loss to all.

Lastly, Committee of Management themselves were convinced that if there was to be any cattle grazing at all the man with a licence was likely to be a better guardian of the countryside he uses for profit than the man who slips in his cattle surreptitiously and illegally.

The conviction was not altogether well founded.

Naturalists, wildlife conservators and informed national park authorities do not favour the practice.

It is no longer countenanced at Wilsons Promontory National Park although, because there is now no boundary fence separating Yanakie Common from the Park, and no gate at the Darby River bridge – not even a cattle grid – and too few rangers to supervise the comings and goings of the cattle from the Common, the beasts readily find their way into the Park. Even as recently as the 1960s, there were usually a few adorning the Darby River flats to welcome visitors to this famous sanctuary for native fauna and flora.

The fires which have invaded the Park with some regularity have done far more harm than any of the grazing to which it has been subjected but the thought is ever present in the minds of many that the fires might have been far less frequent had there been no cattle grazing.

In 1920 the granite mountains were burned almost bare by fire. The sweat and energy dissipated by the ranger and his assistants in cutting tracks across some of them might have been saved had they waited a few months. Where previously it had been a day's hard labour to travel three or four miles through the tangle of bush in some parts of the Park the fire made it so easy that a horse could trot with little trouble over the bald waste.

Another big fire came in 1926, another in 1938 and yet another in 1940 but the greatest came in February 1951 when 75,000 acres of the Park were laid waste.

In 1961 several thousand acres between the





Prom visitor and reluctant Chalet horse, 1920s.

Photo courtesy Historic Places, Department of Sustainability and Environment, Victoria

Darby River and the Darby Saddle were swept and in the Easter period of 1962 about 30,000 acres of the Singapore Peninsula–Barry’s Hill district were again burned.

Even the most resilient species of animal and the most fire-resistant plant cannot withstand such frequent holocausts. Nor can the visitor feel entirely comfortable while there is no assurance that it will not happen again – with him in the middle of it. The hazard has been one with which no Committee of Management could have possibly coped.

As folk in settled places well know, fire prevention and measures for fire control and fire fighting are things to be highly organised.

Such measures require an amount of labour and equipment far beyond the scope and capacity to provide by a few citizens operating on a shoe-string budget. In fact, because the Park is the property of all the people, it is at last recognised that its protection is the responsibility of everyone.

Today circumstances have changed to an extent that lessens the hazard that formerly existed. The people’s National Parks Service endeavours to ensure that fire prevention measures are not only practicable but effectively established.

Fire fighting, if needed, can be swiftly organised as

was demonstrated when the fire of autumn 1961 raged in the hills and flats southeast of the Darby River.

Perhaps, after a few decades of freedom from fire, a lot of the vegetation will have developed to a condition where the fire-prone scrub and grasslands will have disappeared to be replaced by the safer park-like forests and timbered plains which were so much admired by Mueller and his contemporaries more than a century ago. Nature has a way of healing her wounds and she may do it well enough if man can be persuaded to refrain from interfering too much.

Sometimes, of course, other agencies hinder the process and the rabbit is one of them.

That animal which gained entry to the Park about 1920 (despite the fence) had, within a few years, colonised the vulnerable sandhills near the Chalet and elsewhere. It was often to be seen grazing contentedly on the grassy plains which extend north from the Darby to Corner Basin.

Its presence in the Park has had the usual result of either initiating or accelerating erosion as well as of taking food from the mouths of the native herbivores – kangaroo, wallaby and wombat. The advent of modern control measures, if wisely applied, may lessen the problems of the future but nothing less than a miracle will exterminate them without exterminating the native

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animals too. The most that can be hoped for is to keep their number in check. Fires will never be eliminated either but their effect can be mitigated.

The presence of horses in the Park has never aroused as much criticism as has been levelled at the presence of cattle and other aliens. They were there as working animals and when not actually working were confined to set grazing paddocks. In any case there were never enough of them to do much damage.

When the Chalet began to operate more horses were brought in to supplement the five or six used for pack and patrol work, so that during the 'season' as many as twenty would be available for the use of visitors. One of the duties of the men stationed at the Darby was to look after and hire out the riding hacks and pack horses to those who wanted to travel wherever a horse would take them – to Sealers Cove, Refuge Cove, the Lighthouse, Barry's Hill, the Vereker Range or Singapore Peninsula.

The tracks were generally kept in good condition and the horses were always ready for a sally to distant places.

One of the highlights of a holiday on the Prom. was an organised conducted trip over one or other of the more popular trails with the pleasure of an overnight camp at the hut at Sealers Cove, Titania Creek or Oberon Bay. These had been built in 1926 and were kept supplied with cooking equipment for the campers and fodder for the horses.

Those accustomed to horses organised their own itineraries and, like the rangers, relied on the good sense of their horses to bring them back safe and sound after a climb over the Bad Saddle or a gallop along the firm sands of Sealers Cove or Oberon Bay. Those happy days came to an end when the Chalet closed in 1942. The horses, like the huts, have now vanished from the scene but, while they existed, many outlying parts of the Promontory, now hardly known, were frequently visited and the huts made the lot of the bushwalker a good deal easier.

A horse in the National Park is a thing of the past. The ranger on patrol uses a Land Rover.

Those were the days when the Committee of Management kept a watchful eye on the plants and animals it had caused to be introduced. For example, the palms planted in Lilly Pilly Gully in 1917 were seen to be still flourishing in 1924 and Secretary Kershaw was quite certain that the lyrebirds were well established at Sealers Cove. A further lot had been liberated there in the winter of 1920 so possibly those were the birds he heard. Those brought in in 1917 appeared to have gone the way of all flesh. The writer of a leaflet distributed by the Tourist Bureau in 1939 had no doubts about its existence in the Park at that time for he wrote:

"In the forest country along Vereker Range and near the track leading eastward across the Promontory to Sealers' Cove, the mimicry of the lyre-bird enthralled the tourist who visits this garden of Nature."

There was one species of bird which the tourist or anyone else was unlikely to see on the Promontory – the Mallee Fowl. Perhaps the oddest experiment in acclimatisation to have been attempted by the Committee was the transfer of the Lowan from its inland mallee habitat to the southern extremity of the State where the annual rainfall was so much higher and the mean winter temperature so much lower than in the mallee regions of the northwest. Needless to say, the birds, after liberation, were never seen again on the Promontory.

Writing to the secretary of the Field Naturalists' Club in 1943 Kershaw mentioned that, including the initial introductions in 1911, twenty native species of mammal, nine species of native bird and some sixty species of native plant had been brought into the Park up to that time.

Plans for continuing the project were postponed and ultimately abandoned soon after the commencement of the Second World War. After the memorable years of 'business as usual' the impact of the war began to be felt and by 1942 the Committee's problems were over for a while. The Park was closed to the public and occupied by A.M.F. as a training centre for the Independent Companies (Australia's commando forces) and later by the Guerrilla [Commando] Warfare School.

Naturalists were worried about the fate of the fauna and flora of the Park during this period of occupation.

Commandos and Guerrilla fighters are not expected nor are they trained to be particularly sensitive about killing things, hence there were fears that very little of the native fauna would be left by the time the army had finished with the Park.

When it was returned to the people in 1946 and re-opened to civilians, impressions were hardly encouraging. The old Chalet was uninhabitable; the animal-proof fence was no longer functional; scarcely a beast was to be discovered and havoc had been wrought in the old familiar haunts.

The road through to Tidal River from the Darby had been improved and it led to what had been the Companies' base camp. Even here sanitary conditions (from the point of view of the general civilian public) were sub-standard and, for some time, only day visitors were allowed into the National Park but, following a good deal of tidying up, the entry permit system was revived and, once again, tourists began to visit the Park—this time to Tidal River. Here the former military establishment had been converted for civilian purposes and several cabins and cottages were opened for the

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use of visitors. In the years following its re-opening to the public the Park became increasingly popular as a tourist resort and visitors began to flock to Tidal River.

The Darby and its Chalet have become but a nostalgic memory. Eventually the buildings at the little settlement were completely demolished, leaving as reminders of their existence only the concrete bases on which they stood.

The area itself is neglected by most travellers as they now hasten on their way to a now well-regulated establishment at Tidal River.

Perhaps the pressure of the seasonal population there may bring about the resurrection of the Darby River settlement someday.

Good accommodation for those who cannot or prefer not to camp is something that is much needed if the glories of Wilsons Promontory are to be shared by some of the thousands who are entitled to visit the National Park. The several cottages, flats and cabins at Tidal River have become inadequate for the number who clamour for them; so much so that, for the regular holiday seasons, they are allotted by ballot. Even caravanners and tent campers are finding it hard to secure a niche in the camping area but, to extend it to all comers, would do only further harm to the diminishing naturalness of the surroundings.

The reasonableness of this opinion will be recognised when one examines the statistics furnished by the National Parks Authority in one of its annual reports.

In the year 1958–59 Tidal River was visited by nearly 28,000 people. In the following year more than 29,500 people came. During 1960–61 there were 38,000 and in 1961–62 the number had grown to 47,000. At this rate of increase the Committee of Management expected to have to cater for 100,000 visitors in the year 1967–68, about half of that number invading the place during the months of December and January.

If the pressure of invasions of this dimension cannot be channelled into other national parks and tourist resorts the very least that can be done is to create another tourist village for those who cannot gain admittance to the Tidal River camp.

Where should such a place be established – if at all?

At the Darby again? But why not at the site of Seaforth or somewhere else on the Singapore Peninsula?

That part of the Park needs some supervision. Although remote from Tidal River it is close to a number of settlements on the mainland from Foster to Welshpool from whence many a party sallies across to the Peninsula for a day's unsupervised and uninhibited enjoyment.

Its scenery is superb, its beaches innumerable,

its potential for the tourist, walker and naturalist exceptional. It was the area chosen for the Chalet by the Toora Progress Association many years ago.

There is a school of thought which believes that the damage or destruction of scenery caused by concentrations of mankind is best confined.

Two tourist villages on the Promontory would only result in the defacement of the natural scenery in two localities instead of one. The less cynical believe that, since this national park (like every other national park) was established for the enjoyment and edification of all who look for enjoyment and edification, all such people are entitled to share it.

One likes to believe that every visitor to a national park realises that the measure of enjoyment available to the other fellow is governed by what has been left for him to enjoy. It can be taken as an axiom that the intrinsic attractions of the National Park lie in its unspoiled scenery and its content of native wildlife. These are the things, really, for which the Park has been set aside to protect and preserve so that all men in all generations may benefit from the aesthetic and spiritual satisfaction which can be derived from them.

How much of Wilsons Promontory National Park can be spared to the visitor? How many visitors can be accommodated within its boundaries at any one time without irreparable damaging or destroying that which they seek to see and enjoy? These are questions which now may seem a little academic but for which, in the decades ahead, an answer must be found.

Naturalists and other well-wishers of the National Park may well pray that a little of the wisdom of Solomon will flow from the Committee of Management through the National Parks Authority to the Government so that whatever is done to preserve and protect this 'Cornwall of Victoria' will be done well and enduringly.

Although its rocks will outlive the years, that which clothes them and adorns them, and that which dwells among them, may easily pass away, its passing, for a time, unnoticed.

## Chapter 8: Early Rangers and Visitors

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In January 1909 the Park's first ranger, Charles J. McLennan, was appointed. He was installed in a canvas tent rigged up in the shelter of a thicket of tea-tree and paperbark beside the Darby River.

The appearance of the river flats as they now are bears little resemblance to the scene as McLennan knew it. The flats were then covered with small trees and shrubs – mostly tea-tree (*Leptospermum laevigatum*) and Swamp Paperbark (*Melaleuca ericifolia*) – and a narrow track wound its way through the trees from a rustic bridge to small open spaces where cattlemen and others had been accustomed to setting up camp. To the east it was more open and paddock-like where the cattle had gathered before dispersing to their grazing grounds. It would have been kept that way by regular burning.

Near the bridge was a clearing where stood a small building known as the telephone test hut. The hut and the small clearing where it stood was the property of the Postal Department. The building held the equipment and maintenance gear needed for the Fish Creek–Lighthouse telephone line and it was visited regularly by the telephone linemen. When McLennan took up his duties he was given access to the telephone.

He was a Scotsman, short and solidly built, with something of the traditional penchant for whisky. He had spent many years in the Mallee, around Pinaroo and in the northwest of Victoria, where he earned a living as a dingo trapper.

He was a keen observer of nature with a special interest in birds – a talent he put to good use by writing natural history notes and articles for newspapers and magazines.

In the days of the *Argus* and *Australasian* nature columnist Donald MacDonald, he was an occasional contributor under the pen name 'Mallee Bird'. One of his articles in *The Australasian* of 20th April 1909 describes his introduction to Wilsons Promontory and its bird life.

It is said that he was paid as much as four or five pounds for an article and, as his one-time assistant, Alex. Selby, comments, "that was money in those days".

McLennan was about sixty years old at the time of his appointment but hale and hearty enough not to be dismayed by the lack of amenities available to him in his new job.

The 16x12 foot tent (with fly tacked to the tent pole!) with a stone fireplace and wooden chimney at one end and a canvas flap at the other made reasonably comfortable quarters for an outdoor man. A camp oven, billies, wash basin and hessian bunk with a few items of simple furniture satisfied his domestic needs.

In contrast to his former Mallee domains there was

no difficulty about a water supply. He had the Darby River.

The Committee provided him with a quiet chestnut mare. It needed to be quiet for Mac. was no horseman. He was a well-seasoned walker but walking in the Mallee is a different proposition to walking on the Promontory, where even confirmed walkers could (and still can) walk themselves into trouble.

The horse, acquired from the Falls brothers who had held the grazing lease on the Promontory, knew all the bogs, morasses and other hazards to be avoided, which was just as well because, like other bird observers, its owner was likely to have his eyes directed towards tree tops rather than at the ground. In some parts of the Park the ground required careful scrutiny if it was to be crossed without mishap. The Darby River could be forded easily enough at its mouth where it trickled across the sand into Darby Bay but higher up, near the ranger's camp, it was deep. Here it was bridged by a couple of logs covered with wooden decking wide enough for cattle to cross in single file.

Tidal River, further south, had no bridge at all. A cattle track crossed its course at a particularly boggy spot on the slopes near the site of the present bridge. The crossing was safely negotiable only because the cattlemen had corduroyed it with heavy logs. Despite the logs cattle had been known to become engulfed in the morass after being pushed off the track by their companions. Much the same sort of bogs exist upstream along the course of the Darby River and over on Singapore Peninsula between Three Mile Beach and Mount Hunter. Experienced horses and cattle ventured into these bogs just 'so far but no further' so McLennan wisely accepted the advice of the local cattlemen and used a horse.

At first his duties were rather nominal. His time was largely occupied in getting to know the Promontory and its denizens, noting population densities and selecting routes to places of interest. A number of tourist tracks were planned to places such as Sealers Cove, Refuge Cove, Oberon Bay and one or two of the more spectacular gullies which had been discovered by those who had carried out the biological and botanical surveys in previous years. To get the work going the ranger was provided with an assistant in the shape of a 17-year-old youth named Dick Selby.

When Selby took up his appointment in July 1909 (at 10 shillings a week with the privilege of finding his own tucker) he arrived by the route which at that time was the recognised approach to the Park – by boat from Bowen (now known as Port Franklin) to the Yanakie Landing.

The traveller arrived at Bennison by train and was then conveyed by horse tram to Port Franklin. This





Visitors at the Darby Chalet, Wilsons Promontory National Park, about 1925.  
Photo courtesy Historic Places, Department of Sustainability and Environment, Victoria

conveyance was a kind of trolley car which ran on a spur line built to carry supplies and equipment brought by sea for the construction of the Great Southern Railway – the main South Gippsland line.

When that purpose had been served the steam engines and trucks were withdrawn but the line was allowed to remain for the use of the local fishermen who could convey their catches direct from the boat to the rail siding at Bennison. Much the same kind of arrangement existed at Port Welshpool.

The trolley, while not designed for passenger transport, was frequently used for that purpose even though in the fishing season it did stink to high heaven by reason of the accumulation of fishy residues which clung to it.

Having arrived at Bowen, travellers could engage one or other of the fishermen to take them across to the Promontory, provided the tide was on the flow. If prior arrangements had been made Billy Millar would be there at the Yanakie Landing with his wagonette to convey the visitors and their luggage to his cottage, and from there to the Darby River.

The arrangements were made through the good offices of the occupants of the Yanakie leasehold – generally the Falls brothers, Jim and Will. They, along with the Buckleys and Cotters, had taken up leases there in 1892 when the old Yanakie Pastoral Run was resumed by the Crown and subdivided. They had renewed the lease in 1898, this time for 25 years.

The brothers' holdings and the National Park had a

common boundary, and since there was no boundary fence the cattle were free to wander into the Park – into the erstwhile grazing lease which, for so long, had been their familiar territory.

Although this intrusion was a source of irritation to the Committee of Management and one which gave a lot of unnecessary work to the ranger, who had continually to round the cattle up and drive them back to their owners' property, the parties maintained amiable relations.

Falls' head stockman, Billy Millar, lived with his wife and son at the 'Old Homestead', which stood near the site of the present aerodrome, and by his employers' favour he was always available to help visitors to find their way to the Darby River.

Billy's wife was a sister of W.J. (Bill) Cripps, a Bowen fisherman, and it was Cripps who brought the lad across to the Yanakie Landing where he was met by Billy Millar.

After spending the night as the guest of the Millars he was taken to the Darby and duly delivered to ranger McLennan. He took up his quarters in a tent similar to that used by the senior Ranger.

His first job was to cut a bridle track from Tidal River to Sealers Cove and this was done with the help of Cripps. It was a task arduous enough to remain a vivid memory to Selby even after the lapse of fifty years.

After crossing the corduroy track over the Tidal River morass the route ascended to some dense scrub, following an apparently ancient trail (it was in fact a



Model T Ford caught in waves en route to Darby River, 1927. An inland road from Yanakie to Darby River was completed in the late 1920s and extended to Tidal River in the 1930s. Right, negotiating sand dunes near Darby River, about 1927. Photo courtesy Historic Places, Department of Sustainability and Environment, Victoria



relic of the timber milling days of some forty years earlier). The toilers had to use slashers to penetrate the barricade of wire-grass and, at one spot on the steep slope, a big tree trunk lay across the trail. Much time and energy were spent in cutting out a block of it to permit further progress. Sunday, the day of rest, dawned and the two set off up hill to a more open timbered area to get their bearings but the blazed trail led them into a dense gully into a veritable tangle of very high bracken and wire-grass.

They followed the gully downhill, slashing a path as they went, and came to a spot where the blade of the fernhook struck a metal object. On scraping away the litter the pair discovered that they were on, and in fact had been following, a timber-tram track which went up and over the hill. They followed it and presently reached a point where the scrub opened. 'There' said Selby 'lay before us one of the loveliest spots I have ever seen – Sealers Cove – wild and unspoiled. Moored at an old jetty, much of which was perfectly sound, was the *Despatch*, red lead and all. The steamer was sheltering from a gale. (The *Despatch* was one of the steamers which operated on the Gippsland Lakes at that time. It was wrecked at Lakes Entrance in September 1911. *Omeo* and *Gippsland* were two other well-remembered vessels which sailed those waters.)

The two men made their way to the beach for a yarn with the mate, Alfred Wise, and, refreshed with a

pannikin of tea, they retraced their steps to the camp in the scrub.

A day or so later the track to the Cove was completed.

As the visitor of today well knows, it branches from the lighthouse track at what is now the car turntable below and to the east of the summit of Mount Oberon. There a signpost encourages one to believe that the Cove is just eleven kilometres away, easily reached by a three hour walk, but this is often disputed by those who have not been properly conditioned to hiking on the Promontory.

Since 1909 it has been successively overgrown and re-cut a number of times. Now at last it is likely to remain clear of undergrowth, logs and litter to provide a pleasant walk along a trail that will accommodate three or four abreast instead of in single file as of yore. No longer is it an adventure to follow the trail to Sealers Cove.

Back in 1909 things were very much quieter and the two track cutters spent some time exploring the adjacent bush.

They discovered two well preserved huts, the

remains of the saw mill which had operated there not much more than a couple of years earlier, and the route of one of the tracks which penetrated far back into the ranges, crossing Sealers Creek and several other small streams with substantial bridges which had been built to accommodate the log trolleys. The bridges as well as most of the mill had been dismantled when the millers departed but enough remained of the bridges and huts to permit of reconstruction without much trouble and expense had the Committee so desired.

It was at Sealers Cove that Selby saw a Pilot Bird's nest for the first time and, for the first time, observed the Beautiful Firetail in the dense scrub near the creek. It was his recollection of Sealers Creek gully that persuaded him to recommend it to Mathison, who succeeded McLennan as ranger, as the place where lyrebirds should be liberated.

Selby and McLennan were an incompatible pair. By the following December Selby had taken a job in more congenial company – with one of the Falls brothers with whom he worked as a stockman for some time. It was while thus employed that he was commissioned by Falls to trap lyrebirds for delivery to the Park. With Jack Bourke, another of Falls's men, he managed to collect a number, including two fully fledged males. They were duly released in Sealers gully and, until the great bushfire which swept down from Singapore Peninsula a few years later, were reliably reported to be well established.

The Committee of Management was determined that the National Park should be a true sanctuary and a place for the preservation of as many species as possible of Australian wildlife – rare or otherwise. They rightly judged that what was rare today might well be extinct tomorrow and what was common had but very slender chances of remaining so unless habitat for them was retained inviolate. Their only mistake lay in the belief that Wilsons Promontory was the ideal habitat.

It certainly was well suited for an extraordinarily large variety of plants but, curiously enough, the vertebrate animal life it carried has never been remarkably varied.

Man has not been kind to the place and its value for such animals as it harboured has steadily declined to a stage where only radical measures can hope to restore it successfully to the condition which it was even fifty years ago.

Fire has been the major and most terrible agent of habitat destruction. The Promontory's use as a cattle ranch runs a good second. A third important factor is now making itself apparent – the growing density of the human invasion and the 'developments' needed for the comfort and accommodation of its thousands of visitors.

McLennan was instructed to commence a program of fauna introduction. With the help of Constable Corrie of Foster a few kangaroo hunts were undertaken in the Woodside district – with rather disappointing results. A couple of emus were captured and released near the Darby River.

However, the residents of the district entered into the spirit of the thing. Constable Corrie donated two kangaroos. Mr Crawford brought along a wombat, and Jim Falls, who had a lot of cattle grazing illegally in the Park, offered to trap a few lyrebirds and satin bower birds and, later, brought in four more wombats which Mr Thomson of Kinglake was doubtless glad to get rid of from his own property. The wombats quickly dug in at the foot of Darby Hill where they proceeded to make a nuisance of themselves for some time to come. Eventually they were banished to a more remote and less vulnerable part of the Park – over towards Whisky Creek. The task of trapping them fell to Mathison, who succeeded McLennan as ranger in mid-December 1910.

McLennan's career as ranger came to an abrupt end as a consequence of what was described as 'gross negligence' in a matter involving the telephone.

In 1892 the Post and Telegraph Department acquired an area on the south bank of the Darby River, where it erected a hut to house the telephone and switch gear. When the National Park was established fourteen years later the paddock was excluded from the Park but, by arrangement with the Department, the ranger was authorised to use the telephone – at the usual charges – and thus was given access to the hut.

In October 1910 plans were being made for a great event.

The State Governor, Sir T. D. Gibson Carmichael, in leisure moments a keen entomologist, was going to pay a visit to the National Park, and the visit was to be made the occasion for a nature study excursion. The preparatory work and (as we might call it) the count-down to the moment of his arrival could be greatly facilitated by use of the telephone and Secretary Kershaw expected to be able to make good use of it, but evidently things went awry. McLennan's independent character and Kershaw's autocratic manner were irreconcilable.

The ranger, tired of being tied to the telephone hut at the stipulated times, overcame the annoyance by simply disconnecting the telephone and departed for a spree at Foster or Fish Creek.

Legend has it that he was at Fish Creek refreshing himself at Andy Unger's pub while awaiting the arrival of the Governor and party. No doubt his friends at Foster or Fish Creek had relayed to him Kershaw's instructions about the further arrangements for transporting His Excellency and party to the Park, and



so it was that on Saturday 24th October he was there waiting. Unhappily the Great Southern Express arrived late, and Unger's hospitality so engrossed the ranger as to cause him to lose interest in the whole affair.

The Committee was considerably discomfited, although one may doubt whether the Governor was much upset. From that time the ranger was *persona non grata*. Shortly afterwards he retired from the scene, and a few weeks later his place was taken by Gordon Mathison of Poowong.

Despite the poor start the excursion was a great success, and His Excellency and suite, accompanied by municipal dignitaries, their wives and a team of naturalists, which included several members of the Committee of Management, was able to visit the Darby River, the vicinity of Mount Vereker, Chinaman's Long Beach and Biddy's Camp. Since that time several Vice Regal personages have enjoyed informal visits to the Park, but, curiously enough, those who have organised Royal tours have never considered the place as worthy of inclusion in an itinerary.

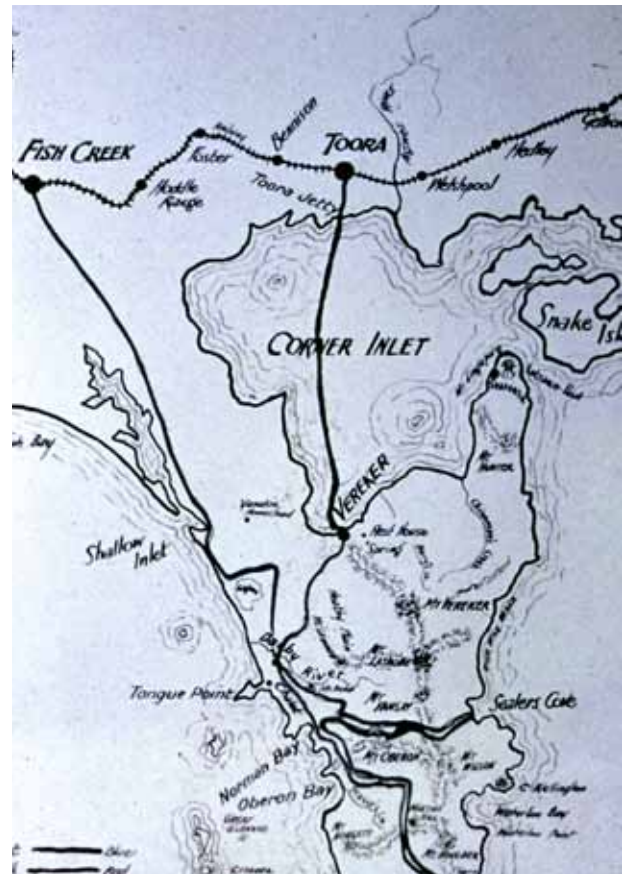
If we are indeed proud of Wilsons Promontory National Park (or any other of our national parks) surely we should make a point of letting our honoured guests see something of the source of our pride – even if it does lack a luxury hotel with a Royal Suite.

Vice Regal personages seem to have survived and even enjoyed the primitive atmosphere of the place.

During the six months while McLennan and Selby were together they were the only permanent residents in the National Park. Although the place was lonely enough for most of the time they could, when in residence, generally depend on some sort of company dropping in or else the solitude might be broken by a trip to the 'New Homestead' at Yanakie, then occupied by the Muldoons. Here one or the other would collect the weekly mail and return to the Darby well fed and laden with fresh meat and home-baked bread. On the way in or out the traveller could be sure of a welcome, a cup of tea and a yarn at Harry McLean's hut.

McLean lived a kind of hermit's life in one of two cabins over on Shallow Inlet, situated in a place which used to be part of Fraser's Shallow Inlet Run – the pastoral station which in earlier days adjoined the Yanakie Run.

The other cabin belonged to two brothers, Tom and George Winchester, who used it as their fishing shack during the fishing season. Both of them became well known to regular visitors to the Park during the years when the recognised land route to the Darby from Fish Creek or Foster included a six-mile stretch of sandy beach along the eastern shores of Waratah Bay. Visitors intent on making their way to the Park by that track came on to the beach not far from the cabins, and in



Map of Wilsons Promontory, c.1925.  
Photo courtesy Historic Places, Department of Sustainability and Environment, Victoria

doing so, if they were wise, called on McLean or the Winchesters for advice about the times of ebb and flow of the tide.

McLean was an occasional visitor to the Darby. He and McLennan had a good deal in common. Both were good bushmen. They shared an interest in natural history, especially in bird life, and both preferred the quiet of solitude. They were evidently well educated and enjoyed an argument, especially if it arose out of some ornithological discussion. According to Selby a stuffed wedge-tail eagle which graced the entrance to McLennan's tent provided material for endless argument.

McLean was said to be a chemist by profession and the shelves of his tidily kept cabin were lined with the Proceedings of the Royal Society, scientific reference books, classics and volumes which today are regarded as collectors' items but which to him were there for study and recreation.

When the Field Naturalists' Club had its first official excursion to the National Park in the summer holidays of 1912-13 McLean was engaged as camp assistant, so it may be inferred that he was not an



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altogether dedicated hermit. In fact, the Committee of Management engaged him from time to time for various labouring jobs in the Park.

There used to be a free-flowing freshwater spring at the base of Darby Hill and he was employed to fence it as a protection from animals. Because of the number of cattle wallowing about on the Darby flats the fence was very necessary. The spring provided a reliable water supply in the summer when rainwater tanks became depleted.

The Committee lost no time in planning improvements, the first of which was a three-roomed galvanised iron cottage for the ranger and fifty-foot jetty over at the 'Beehives' or, as it came to be known, 'the South-west Corner' or, simply, 'the Vereker landing'. The boundary fence was another item requiring immediate attention.

Stanmore of Jeparit contracted to do all the jobs and, towards the end of 1910, the cottage was ready for occupation. The £50 jetty was completed a little later. It had to be rebuilt within a few years.

The building of the jetty reduced one of the minor hazards of entry to the National Park.

Those who preferred the route from the 'Beehives' landing to the isthmus track from the Yanakie landing would arrange for a boatman to run them across to the south-west corner. The cautious boatman would time his arrival at the landing place to coincide with high tide. With a combination of judgment and luck the boat could come right inshore while there was sufficient water to keep it afloat. The passengers could then jump ashore with comparative ease. If luck was out or judgment at fault they would have to wade through a stretch of shallow water which covered an appreciable depth of sticky black ooze overlain by a thin veneer of sand. At low tide there might be no water at all. The ooze would then be seen to be populated with myriads of mangrove crabs.

The new jetty, while it remained serviceable, saved the discomfort of squelching through mud.

Over at the Darby the new cottage became the home of Mathison and his family from the time he commenced duty until he resigned at the end of April 1914. It is doubtful whether McLennan ever occupied the cottage.

The new ranger was a tall, lanky and rather bow-legged man with a drooping moustache – the type of man people sometimes refer to as having been 'born on a horse'. Whether he enjoyed the life is hard to say. Evidently he was determined not to endure quite the same austerity as his predecessor because arrangements were soon made for him to keep a couple of milch cows and, within six months of commencing

duty, he had persuaded the Committee to supply him with a number of fruit trees – apples, pears and peaches. Kershaw arranged to get them for nothing from the Emerald nurseryman Nobeliuss, through the good offices of his friend Charles French the Government entomologist.

Although the trees possibly provided successive rangers with fresh fruit there is now nothing at all on the Darby River flats to give the slightest hint that there ever was a small orchard there.

Of course, the cottage was inadequate for a family man. The building had cost the Committee £15 but the alterations and additions sought by Mathison and carried out in the winter of 1912 cost an additional £128. The ranger now had a comfortable cottage of reasonable size, water laid on from the spring, and, by arrangement with the Posts and Telegraph Department, a telephone. It had been transferred from the old hut. Mrs Mathison was appointed honorary officer in charge of the telephone office.

Mathison carried on from where McLennan left off in the fauna introduction program. Every now and again a consignment of animals had to be collected from Fish Creek and distributed to a selected part of the Park. They came from various parts of the State – usually as donations. Quinney of Mortlake sent four possums and bandicoots; another batch of four possums from some other benefactor was taken to Lilly Pilly Gully. Freeman of Bennison brought in a few more lyrebirds; someone else sent down a couple of emus from Creswick and another from Maryborough. Between them Mathison and Corrie captured several young kangaroos at Woodside and some Tasmanian Black Possums were released in the Vereker Range. Collins of Woodside offered to get the Committee as many emus as it was prepared to buy at 10/- each. The committee settled for £6 worth. In between times Mathison shared with the Committee the worries caused by wandering stock.

When the Promontory became a national park the four grazing leases were not renewed by the Lands Department, but this did not matter much to the Falls brothers who held the Corner Inlet lease. There was no fence to separate the former lease from their current leasehold which adjoined the boundary of the Park and, for some time, upwards of 800 head of their cattle enjoyed free agistment in the Park, much to the annoyance of the Committee. In 1908 the Government had promised to set aside \$800 for the purpose of erecting a boundary fence but before the work could begin the money had been diverted to some other job on Mount Buffalo. In the absence of money the fence project had to be deferred. Meanwhile the Committee thought the best that could be done would be to renew the Falls' lease and let them graze their cattle with a

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clear conscience on condition that they paid £50 for past favours and £150 for the right to graze 800 head for the next three years. The brothers agreed and good relations were restored.

When McLennan departed one of them was engaged as caretaker of the Park pending the appointment of a new ranger. They were good friends to the Committee and its secretary in a number of ways in the years that followed.

When the money from the fence did become available the job went ahead with reasonable speed. By the autumn of 1911 it was well under way and, by June, the first section was completed according to specification. Unfortunately the specification was astray on one or two important points.

The wire netting was stapled to the wrong side of the posts. Cattle outside the Park had only to lurch against the wire to force it from its hold. A few heavy lurches would soon bring the wire down. It was a seven foot fence with a two-foot overhang at the top to prevent foxes and dogs jumping up and over, but the overhang was built pointing the wrong way so as to make the effort of jumping into the Park a lot easier. The Public Works Department had the errors corrected.

This so-called 'vermin-proof fence' did not follow precisely the actual boundary line between the Park and the Crown leaseholds occupied by the Falls brothers. By agreement it took in eighty or ninety acres of the south-eastern (?) end of Block 76 so as to bypass a swamp. In return the lessees were given an equivalent area of the Park on the northern(?) side of Block 74 which, at the time, they were leasing from the Committee. The brothers accepted this arrangement because the Lands Department had let it be known that it proposed to exclude the swamp from the lease when it came up for renewal in 1923 and they surmised that they didn't have much to lose anyway.

A second and last section remained to be built and tenders for the job were called in the spring of 1911 and in 1912 its completion was announced. Now grazing could be properly controlled and the Committee could rely on having a steady income by letting in just as many cattle as it considered the place could carry for whatever period it thought fit at sixpence a head (threepence for poddies). Cattle agistment and grazing became a quite established business which kept successive rangers pretty fully occupied. In the first three years it netted £300 for the Committee, but it was only a beginning.

As well as looking after fences, cattle, introduced animals and general maintenance work at the Darby River, Mathison was expected to patrol the Park regularly and report on progress of the developments which began to move swiftly.

One of the 'developments' was the Forestry Department's plantation over on Barry's Creek.

To properly appreciate the reason for the existence of the plantation it should be understood that before its dedication as a national park Wilsons Promontory was simply Crown land, sometimes under threat of piecemeal alienation and mostly under lease for grazing. By law, forests on Crown land were the responsibility of the Forests Department. That law still obtains, the only significant difference being that the forests are now [1960s] administered by a Commission – the Forests Commission of Victoria which was set up in 1918.

When the Promontory became a national park in 1908 neither the Committee nor the Forests' Department were quite sure whether the latter's statutory duties still persisted and, in February 1909, the Committee played safe by agreeing to the Department's proposal that it should establish an experimental plantation of exotic trees in the Park. A site on Barry's Creek was chosen. It was to occupy 2,640 acres (about two and three-quarters square miles) and included sixty chain on each side of the stream and stretched from highwater mark to Barry's Hill. The Committee acquiesced on the understanding that the Department would plant an equal number of native trees, that it would fence the plantation and do all the work necessary for its upkeep. Its employees would be expected to observe the Park regulations which had been promulgated only a few months earlier.

When Mathison came on the scene he found a team of men busy clearing the area and, in their leisure time, shooting the native animals. The Conservator of Forests promised to see that their guns were confiscated.

The place must have been very lively. Boatloads of seedling pines and a few other exotic trees were brought in and planted. Boatloads of curious fishermen and sightseers also came over to watch progress.

The Department seemed not to welcome the kind of publicity it was getting and an attempt was made to stop visitors entering the plantation, but Kershaw curtly pointed out that the control of the whole Park was vested in the Committee of Management and the Committee's policy was to encourage visitors.

When the plantation scheme got under way in May 1909 the Department had tree men working there and it proposed to build a cottage which the park ranger would be permitted to use when on patrol. There would be no objection to the Committee erecting a permanent dwelling on the site if it desired to do so.

In 1912, on the insistence of the Committee, the Department fenced the plantation and provided it with a locked gate. The ranger was given a key. It is doubtful if the fence would have been built had it not been for

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the damage alleged to have been done to the seedling trees by marauding wallabies and Falls's cattle.

All that was now required was the 'permanent building' and the Committee set aside £279 for a four-roomed galvanised iron cottage plus a 30' x 10' iron shed to be built at the northeast corner of the plantation.

For some time a site for a ranger's cottage in the vicinity of Mount Singapore had been under consideration—either at Entrance Point near Biddy's Camp or on the other side of the Peninsula at Freshwater Cove.

The Toora Progress Association, which took a lively interest in the new national park, wanted the tourist centre to develop on the Peninsula where it would be best placed for business in and around Toora. The Association envisaged a government-owned hotel or hostel—on the Esplanade at Seaforth perhaps! There it would be conveniently situated for the local people to provide transport of both visitors and supplies.

At another time the Association suggested a jetty at Biddy's Camp, and was toying with the idea of having the Chalet or hotel at that spot. The general opinion, however, appeared to favour Freshwater Cove because, in May, 1912, the Association was advised of plans to build a jetty there.

The jetty never materialised. Instead, the money which could have been used for it was spent on rebuilding the jetty at the Vereker Landing. The £50 job, completed just two years earlier, had not endured very well. The new structure lasted a lot longer. It was in regular use for more than a decade but in 1922 it had begun to suffer from neglect and it gradually disintegrated.

It has now almost entirely vanished. At low tide a few stumps are still to be seen on the tidal mud flats to awaken memories of the few still living who walked its deck.

The existence of the Forestry Department's 'Arboretum' provided a good reason for having the ranger's cottage at Barry's Hill. Another good reason was that it was about half way between the Vereker Landing and Freshwater Cove and, therefore, conveniently placed no matter in what locality the future tourist centre might develop.

The cottage was ready for occupation in November 1912. Possibly the Department reimbursed the committee for its outlay, although that is an inference drawn from the advice which the Committee received from Mr Boston, officer in charge of the State Plantation at Wail near Dimboola.

Boston was evidently the supervisor of the Barry's Creek plantation and he notified Kershaw that the

cottage was not for the use of visitors to the Park. Of course he may have been referring to the cottage the Department contemplated building, not to the one the Committee caused to be built. But regardless of who paid for it, the well-built little house was situated in an almost idyllic spot not far away from Barry's Creek and close to the shore of Corner Basin. It was surrounded by groves of grand old Banksias and tall Manna Gums inhabited by a large colony of koalas. To this haven came W.J. Cripps of Bowen.

Cripps was appointed 'Ranger in charge of the Inlet' as from the 1st December 1912.

The 42-year-old fisherman was no stranger to the park, nor to its managers. He had helped Selby to cut the track from Tidal River to Sealers Cove three years earlier. During the days of his career as a fisherman he had nosed his boat into practically every accessible part of the Promontory's eastern and southern coastline. Cripps took on the job with the hope that the change in environment might restore the health of his ailing wife, but she died in the winter of 1914—some eighteen months later.

With the cottage inside the boundaries of the plantation the Committee was obliged to take a rather greater interest in what was going on there than might otherwise have been the case. It evinced its interest by requesting the Department to burn a firebreak around the plantation. Since the Committee assumed control of the Park it had experienced several severe bushfires. In October 1910—a week or so before the visit of the State Governor—an extensive fire swept the country inland from Five Mile Beach.

About eighteen months later another occurred in the Miranda Bay area, and in January 1912 there were two more big fires—one near Little Oberon Bay and another on the east coast of Singapore Peninsula, over towards Biddy's Camp. There was no telling. The next one might be at Barry's Creek.

The last-mentioned two fires were ascribed to the carelessness of Falls's cattlemen and brought forth vigorous protests from the several societies which the members of the Committee represented. The pressure was great enough to cause the Committee to announce that cattle grazing in the Park was to cease as from June 1913.

Many of the fires which occurred in the early years of the National Park originated within the Park—usually at places where cattle were to be grazed – and Singapore Peninsula was certainly the most favoured grazing area during that period and since.

The Peninsula was far removed from the normal patrol routes of either of the rangers and the eastern coastline was open to any who cared to travel by boat.

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The Mount Hunter tin prospecting leases and the continued use of the Park as a cattle run made things no easier for the rangers. Their greatest worry must surely have been the ever-present threat of fire in the summer and autumn.

Not without good reason were the cattlemen blamed for many of the fires. Their business was cattle, not the conservation of wildlife, and many if not most of them simply could not understand why anyone should want to feed a lot of useless wild animals at the expense of cattle which had obvious economic value.

Fires were a traditional and quite normal aid to what cattlemen believed to be good grazing practice and they failed to see anything reprehensible in firing their leaseholds in the Park. It was not easy for the rangers to cope with that philosophy.

The destruction of animals by fire is not viewed with any equanimity by the public, so that when, in the autumn of 1912, the holocaust swept down from the Singapore Peninsula grazing lease to Sealers' Cove and destroyed some twenty thousand acres of the Park and its inhabiting wildlife, the outcry was sufficiently loud and sustained to cause the Committee to cancel the lease.

Most of the Committee members were only too glad to agree to the cancellation, even though it would mean a loss of revenue of about £150. Fortunately the Government's annual grant of £500 was still maintained. Without it all developmental and maintenance work would have had to cease.

The Committee had no other source of income.

Many people have been puzzled by the apparent inconsistency of the Committee of Management towards this problem of cattle grazing in the National Park. The majority of its members must have disliked the practice, yet they tolerated it. Why?

It was not entirely a matter of revenue. There was a strong element of politics in it. Had the government grant been more liberal there would have been no need for the Committee to have attempted to supplement its income in this way.

It was a well-established policy of governments to settle men on the land and, having got them there, to keep them in business. In too many instances this could be done only by overstocking and by other forms of land misuse. The farmers themselves, under the relatively primitive conditions existing in the early part of this [20<sup>th</sup>] century (and to some extent even now) were not able to carry an economically sound number of cattle on their holdings, and so otherwise idle Crown lands were leased to cattlemen.

The Lands Department is the trustee of Crown lands and, as a government department, is subject

to government policy and, consequently, to political direction and pressure.

Wilsons Promontory National Park is Crown land whose trustee was, in fact, the Lands Department which had appointed a committee of citizens to manage it as a national park.

If it was government policy to utilise the Park to produce some revenue by throwing it open to graziers then the Department had no option but to see that that policy was put into effect under the best possible terms.

It is only through catastrophes of the kind exemplified by the 1912–13 fire that the men who shape government policy can be jolted into thinking about much else than money-making because the 'best possible terms' generally meant no more than getting as much revenue as possible in return for as small an outlay as practicable.

It has been estimated that the few thousands of pounds gained over the years from the sale of grazing rights and agistment fees in the national parks of the State has cost Victorians more than two million pounds—a sum arrived at after taking into consideration the steady and continuous depreciation of a once rich public asset and the cost of piecemeal attempts at rehabilitation.

The leasing of Wilsons Promontory National Park for private profit cannot be considered as having been a gilt-edge investment in State development.

When the seriousness of this fire became known, a deputation was arranged to press for the cancellation of the grazing leases. A.G. Campbell, a member of the deputation, had been, for years, campaigning rather forthrightly against the practice, but he had made little headway.

When the Department's spokesman stated that the managers of the Park depended upon grazing for revenue it was too much for Campbell. He jumped to his feet, thumped the table and roared 'You get revenue from it, do you? It saves the Government financing the place from public funds, does it? Well, why not run cattle in the Botanic Gardens, another of our public parks, and save some more!'

It was heavy sarcasm, but it seemed to reflect the feelings of the public at that time.

Grazing was discontinued for a while.

Oddly enough, the Promontory fires seem to have occurred in greatest frequency in the years in which the Committee's fauna introduction program was being pursued with its greatest vigour. It would have been astonishing if the recently introduced lyrebirds had escaped the 1912–13 fire.

The departure of the cattle freed the rangers for other work. As a kind of counter to the Barry's



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Creek plantation the Committee instituted its own planting program and, at every opportunity, native trees or shrubs or their seeds were planted. The Field Naturalists' Club, during its first official visit, had ceremoniously carried out some planting and it fell to the lot of ranger Cripps to look after the specimens.

In the early winter of 1913 he was busily engaged in planting specimen trees on the Vereker Range and pines and Coast Tea-tree on the eastern side of Do Boy Island. In between times he functioned as a caretaker of the Forestry Department's plantation with the added responsibility of keeping the fence and sheds in good repair. For this the Committee proposed to levy the Department £60 as a contribution towards Cripps's salary of £104 per annum. After considering the matter for about nine months the Department agreed to contribute \$25.

The Arboretum was a discouraging venture. In March, 1915—about six years after it had been started—Cripps, in his monthly report to the Committee, said that it was not thriving. The plants were mostly miserable specimens from twelve to eighteen inches high. A few in sheltered positions had reached a height of four feet! It took some years for the thing to be entirely forgotten. Even the site would be difficult to identify now.

An interesting point about the project is the conclusion reached time and again that, without special attention and perseverance, alien plants have a very hard struggle for survival when set down in a well established community of natives. Their root systems appear to be ill-adapted for successfully competing with the original inhabitants for the essential minerals which concentrate at different levels, and, if they do happen to strike it lucky, their luck may hold no longer than the first bushfire. Much of the native vegetation is well adapted to survive burns, something for which the human inhabitants of the country can be grateful.

Olaf Petersen of Foster, who had built the Barry's Hill cottage, rebuilt the Vereker landing jetty and enlarged Mathison's cottage, was also responsible for providing the first rest huts to appear in the Park. One was put in a sheltered clearing at the Darby River not far from the ranger's cottage and the other on a low cliff above the shore at the Vereker landing. Both were 14' x 20' galvanised structures fitted with a door, four bunks, two forms, a trestle table and fireplace with chimney.

The first permit to camp was issued by Kershaw on the 2nd June 1909, since which date there was steady flow of applications. The Committee had long realised that the visitors would carry away a more favourable impression of their national park if only they could be spared the discomforts attendant on camping in the open air in a place renowned for its high average rainfall

and subject to drenching summer showers. The rest huts were intended as overnight shelters and picnic cabins for day visitors and as places where campers could dry their clothes if need be. They proved to be a great convenience to shooting parties too.

Bill Cripps's cottage was six or seven miles east of the Vereker landing so he could not continuously supervise that rest hut. Mathison's house, however, was quite close to the Darby hut and therefore he had less excuse for failing to keep an eye on it and its visitors. One party was so ill-advised as to leave their rifles lying about in the hut when permitted visitors were there. Kershaw's wrath was showered on Mathison's head when he came to hear of it.

The building program was not yet finished.

From the beginning the Committee had made its visits of inspection an annual event. The first, in January 1909, was by sea. The lighthouse ship *Lady Loch* landed the party at the lighthouse and Billy Millar—the son of the Millar who had managed the Yanakie Run for McHaffie and later had taken up the lease himself—was prevailed upon to act as guide.

As a matter of historical interest it is worth recording that in 1897 Mrs E.M. Millar, widow of McHaffie's manager, still held 13,000 acres on lease under the old Land Act of 1860. It cost her £55 a year. Her son Billy held the Old Homestead block at a rental of £15. Buckley's blocks (Nos. 71, 72 and 73) were worth £6. When the old run was subdivided for settlement about 1892 Mrs Millar strongly opposed the excision of Blocks 74, 75 and 76, but despite her objections the blocks were separated – although she did manage to retain one of them in an indirect way by acquiring it for her son Billy. It passed to the Falls brothers with whom Billy took a job as head stockmen—and that is how Billy Millar came to be established in the Old Homestead on Yanakie.

The Promontory tracks would have been as familiar to Billy as they had been to his father, consequently the visiting Committee in seeking him as their guide could not have made a better choice. The Falls brothers provided the hacks and pack-horses.

These annual jaunts were somewhat strenuous for those unaccustomed to 'roughing it' and one or two of the Committee felt obliged to find a good reason for staying at home.

On the second inspection the journey was by rail, horse tram, boat and horseback which brought them to the Darby River.

From time to time special trips were made by Kershaw and sometimes Thorn but every visit had to be planned to ensure that the visitors had sea and land transport and food and shelter awaiting them when



Practising eurhythmics, then a popular form of exercise, at Sealers Cove, 1920s.  
Photo courtesy Historic Places, Department of Sustainability and Environment, Victoria

they arrived. While they were a novelty the official inspections were an adventure and, in retrospect at any rate, an enjoyable experience but, as the novelty wore off, the Committee began to consider their own comfort. So it came about that a cottage for the use of the Committee and for other official visitors was built at the Darby. The three room building, with verandah on two sides which Petersen built for £290 was ready for use in the spring of 1913. It formed the nucleus of what was to become, about ten years later, the famous Darby Chalet.

The next item requiring the attention of the Committee was the cutting of tracks. Most of the old ones, formed haphazardly during the pre-National Park days, had vanished in the undergrowth. The telegraph track to the lighthouse remained well enough defined because it was kept open by the two telephone linesmen Clavarina and Varney, but the branch to Sealers Cove which left it on the Oberon Saddle had become badly overgrown since it was cut by Selby and Cripps in 1909. Mathison had kept both the bridle path from the Vereker landing to the Darby and the riverside track to the mouth of the river in fair shape, but the appointment of ranger Cripps provided the opportunity for much more track work than had been possible. The

path from his Barry's Hill cottage to the Vereker landing was kept open and the old cattle track which passed the plantation on its way to Biddy's Camp and Mount Singapore was made fit for a horse patrol if not for tourists.

In December 1913 Cripps, with the help of some outside labour, built a bridge across Chinaman's Creek where it wound its way through a stretch of bog obscured by a dense stand of Paperbark. The present fire access track to Five Mile Beach follows much the same course as it did fifty years ago. Now, of course, it is for most of its length a properly surveyed and well graded road.

Towards the end of 1913 the Committee was able to arrange for a re-survey of the Tidal River-Sealers Cove track, and in the following year work on it commenced. It was intended also to run a track through to Refuge Cove. By June 1914 the first part of the job was done. A good four foot bridle path led from the Darby River to Sealers Cove via the Darby Saddle, Whisky Creek, Tidal River, the Bad Saddle, Mount Oberon and the Ramsay Saddle.

Back in 1909 McLennan had reported that the crew of a ship at anchor in Sealers Cove were seen stripping the decking from the jetty built by the timber millers,

but the Committee could not afford to restore it. Consequently it became more and more derelict as time went on. When the new track was made in 1914 it seemed a practical proposition to have the jetty rebuilt. Accordingly, in February, 1915, a contract for the job was let and duly carried out under the supervision of the Public Works Department.

During the years that followed the condition of the track alternated from that of a good bridle path to an almost impenetrable jungle. Every time a fire came through, the fast growing saplings of hazel, acacia and eucalypt would be killed and in no time masses of ferns and shrubby plants would interlace themselves so intimately among the fallen sticks and trunks that anything bigger than a wombat could not move through the tangle. It is now seeing one of its good periods. In fact, it is at present so easily negotiable that a recent visitor reported having encountered a party of walkers making their way over the saddle carrying a stretcher laden not with a disabled companion but with several cases of beer! Which goes to show that, with adequate planning and sufficient effort, the spirit of the old days can be recaptured—the days when Sealers Cove resounded to the revelry of old salts and sealers.

The branch track to Refuge Cove was not commenced until more than twelve months later. In the meantime the rangers and their helpers busied themselves in cutting a path into Lilly Pilly Gully.

In September 1914 this loveliest of rain forest gullies was open for the world to see. During the next thirty years every visitor to the Darby was encouraged to see the Gully. Nowhere else in Victoria was there known to be one quite like it. Nowhere in Victoria is there such a one now. A bushfire in 1943 accomplished what all bushfires in the preceding 100 years had failed to do. The Gully was burned to ashes. Many years have passed since that calamity, and regeneration is taking place gradually. Possibly in another thirty years the generation of that time may be able to look upon a scene such as their forefathers beheld way back in 1914.

By this time the job of the Park rangers had acquired a rather more responsible character. They were camp superintendents, supervisors, patrol men, cattlemen, watchmen, maintenance men, vermin controllers and labourers, all in one. It must have been too much for Mathison because he resigned at the end of April 1914. Kershaw laconically noted that he was 'glad to see the last of him'—and that may have been because he did not measure up to the standard of efficiency expected by the meticulous Kershaw. He often forgot to send in monthly reports or cattle agistment returns.

His departure brought more work for Cripps, who transferred to the Darby River so that he could keep an eye on the Committee's cottage. It was a kindly-

meant arrangement because it brought the ranger fourteen miles nearer to his ailing wife who was staying at Millar's cottage in the care of her daughter—Billy Millar's wife.

When Mathison's successor, J.G. Holmes of Longwarry, commenced in mid-May Cripps remained to instruct him in his duties. Mrs Holmes became honorary officer in charge of the telephone. One of the new ranger's first jobs was to collect and release in the Park three Red Kangaroos which had been sent by rail from Deniliquin.

After the death of Mrs Cripps the ranger returned to Barry's Hill to take over yet another duty—that of master of the motor boat *Jessie* which the Committee had bought.

Since 1912 his own sailing boat the clinker-built *Grace Darling* (or during periods of flat calm, brother George's motor boat *Daphne*) had been called into service for bringing supplies and visitors across from the mainland. *Daphne* had earned local fame for its capacity to cruise all the way from Bowen to Do Boy Island without stalling or catching fire and thus was considered to be a reliable craft. From now on the Committee intended to provide its own means of transport. *Jessie* was to be manned by Cripps who would bring in the supplies for both the Barry's Hill and Darby River establishments and land them at the Vereker landing jetty. The Darby ranger would carry them across to the Darby by wagon instead of by pack-horse as of yore.

As mentioned elsewhere, it took some time for *Jessie* to become operative but the transport system, when it did get going, provided a good service for some years to come.

The First World War had by now begun to exert its unsettling influence over Australia and Australians but, to many Victorians, particularly those in rural areas, an even more unsettling influence was the severe drought which had descended on the land. The effects were felt as far south as it was possible to go. Bushfires ranged through the Strzelecki Ranges, the Hoddles and Foster Hills, leaving in their wake a scorched earth, starving stock and many very worried farmers and cattlemen.

It may have been nothing more than a coincidence, but the National Park remained unscathed and, since its wide domains had been free of cattle since June, it was one of the few places in Gippsland where there was green feed.

The Committee of Management responded to the State-wide call to agist stock, and grazing in the Park was resumed in December 1914 when it was agreed to admit 2,000 animals for up to three months.

George Freeman was the first to take advantage of the opportunity. He ran in sixty head.





Darby River, showing bridge and original shelter hut for visitors, c.1920.  
Photo courtesy Historic Places, Department of Sustainability and Environment, Victoria

The Freemans were the pioneers of a Government township named Liverpool, which later came to be called Bennison. They were related by marriage to the Cripps family of Bowen.

By March the old graziers were back, and some new ones—Lester McCartney and Stoddart.

By May, cattle were arriving from far distant parts of the State, from districts like Tatura, Kyneton and Strathmerton.

In April, Holmes resigned his job as ranger to enlist for service overseas and it was not until September that his successor, A.J. Freeman of Korumburra, was appointed.

Meanwhile, Cripps was again transferred to the Darby and the Committee arranged for his appointment as an honorary Crown bailiff. He asked that he be permitted to remain at the Darby and the Committee agreed on the condition that his stepsister keep house for him and act as honorary officer in charge of the telephone.

When Freeman arrived Cripps changed his mind and went back to Barry's Hill.

Mrs Freeman, like her predecessors, looked after the telephone and, when need be, catered for official visitors.

About this time some further unwanted introductions were coming to notice. Hares had been seen in the Park in 1909 but seem not to have multiplied significantly. Rabbits were known to be on Yanakie but not yet in the Park, but now the domestic cat was running wild. The Mathison family had brought their cats with them and the progeny had gone bush. Thereafter cats were banned and the rangers were instructed to trap and destroy any they saw.

The Committee itself had permitted plenty of foreign elements to enter the Park. In July 1909 it had decided that the deer known to be there in 1900 should continue to receive the benefits of sanctuary. Cattle and horses were grazed there. In the autumn of 1915 Perennial Rye-grass (*Lolium perenne*) was introduced to provide pasture for the rangers' personal stock. In the following January £50 was spent in planting Marram Grass. In 1912 Uganda Grass had been planted. Both species were introduced to combat erosion.

Some years later another grass was introduced. In July 1924 the ranger in charge of the Inlet sector was given the task of planting *Spartina townsendii* in the mud flats below high tide at the Vereker jetty. The idea was to provide an underwater verge which would be an attractive habitat for marine fauna. With plenty of such



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food available to them aquatic birds would be attracted to the area and their presence could be expected to make a very favourable impression on visitors.

Whether the *Spartina* survived is not known. It is not included in the current list of flora for the Park.

In later years Kikuyu grass (*Pennisetum clandestina*) was brought in as a sand-binder. So long as it is continually grazed, kikuyu is unobjectionable, but ungrazed it can become a quite serious pest, overgrowing everything else, smothering them out of existence. Its advance from the open clearings to the edges of the bush is rapid and it soon forms a barricade as dense and impenetrable as that formed by the native Wire-grass (*Tetrarrhena juncea*).

Proliferation of the latter generally happens after a bushfire has passed through its rain forest habitat but the kikuyu entanglements become most noticeable after an animal poisoning campaign.

The intensive destruction of rabbits and foxes in the Park in 1962–63, by distribution of baits laden with 1080, led to some unanticipated results. Rabbits and foxes were certainly destroyed in great number. Along with them went deer, wombats, wallabies, possums and anything else that fed on the bait or on the carcasses of the dead animals. The regular army of grazing beasts which frequented the Tidal River grassed flats were killed and the kikuyu soon began to assert itself. Within a few weeks it was in among the trees and shrubs.

The more gloomy prophets consoled themselves with the conclusion that within a few years there would be no erosion problems at Tidal River. It would be enveloped in Kikuyu grass.

It may seem a ridiculous thought to entertain but is it? Much of our planned work directed towards controlling nature has been a series of experiments by trial and error. Far too rarely is it planned on the advice of an ecologist—mainly because there are too few trained ecologists to call upon for advice. So, we busy ourselves spreading non-selective deadly poisons throughout the land, introducing foreign insects, mammals and plants wherever we think they will serve some immediate purpose.

We spend huge sums on engineering projects only to find that we have to keep on spending huge sums to maintain those works in serviceable condition because the planning failed to take into account nature's reaction to change.

We blithely let local River Improvement Trusts operate on our streams without regard to what may happen upstream or to what is going to happen downstream. We do the silliest things without knowing how silly they are until after we have done them. Wilsons Promontory National Park has been a grand

place for experiments in making nature subservient to man. It has given even greater value in demonstrating where we have gone wrong in our thinking and planning of its development.

Rangers W.J. Cripps and A.J. Freeman kept a roving eye on the Park, its visitors and the cattlemen during the war years. The tin miners were busy sluicing and excavating holes and tunnels up on Mount Hunter, but so long as they appeared to observe the regulations nothing could be done to stop them or interfere with their operations. Visitors to the mines were always welcome. There was no telling. Some might be persuaded to become investors! But that was the affair of the syndicates, not of the Committee of Management of the Park.

While *Jessie* plied between Port Franklin and the Vereker landing, the new motor launch *Janet Isles* sped between Port Welshpool and Freshwater Cove, Chinaman's Beach or Biddy's Camp. They went their separate ways.

The Toora Progress Association still urged the establishment of a jetty and government Chalet on Singapore Peninsula but the Committee eventually decided in favour of the Darby River area as the place for its accommodation house. The Darby was developing fast as the future permanent settlement. It was at the boundary of the Park. The overland telephone line was at hand. Tracks that some day would become roads led to it, and the earlier difficulties of reaching it from across the waters of Corner Basin were almost overcome.

By 1915 all of the Park fencing had been completed, a jetty had been built at the Vereker landing, and *Jessie* was in service. The Forestry Department's plantation was enclosed and a ranger's cottage stood nearby on Barry's Hill. Bridle tracks led from Barry's Creek to the landing and then on to the Darby where stood a ranger's cottage, a rest hut and the Committee's cottage or 'accommodation house' as it was soon to be called. Tracks led from the Darby to Sealers Cove, to Lilly Pilly Gully, up on to the Vereker Range and the old jetty at Sealers Cove had been restored.

The Darby flats were being steadily cleared to accommodate the ranger's kitchen garden and orchard, to make way for a paddock for the ranger's milch cows and his horses and for the work horses and hacks which the Committee held for its own use.

Nine years had brought many changes in the character of the National Park, and especially to the environs of the No. 4 gate at the Darby River.

Freeman remained for more than two years. He resigned in September 1917 and Cripps, once more, repaired to the Darby. For almost two years he carried on without assistance. The Barry Hill cottage was closed

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and *Jessie* appears to have been put in the charge of his brother George.

In January 1918 the old bridge over the Darby was replaced—a job carried out by the Hall brothers for about £250. In May of that same year the paddock in which stood the Postal Department's old telephone hut was abandoned by the Commonwealth in favour of a similar area on the summit of Mount Oberon. A few months later the old hut was demolished and removed. A notice in the Government Gazette of 12th June 1913 formally brought the small reserve into the National Park and under the control of the Committee.

In 1918 the Park was exempted by order in Council from occupation under Miner's Right for mining and residence. This Order did not affect the Mount Hunter Mining syndicate because the area it leased was not regarded as being an integral part of the National Park although included in the area nominally controlled by the Committee of Management.

Cripps was the ranger at the time of the Railways 8-day Tour in mid-November 1919. Holiday-makers of today might be interested to be reminded that in 1919 one could enjoy an organised camp-out tour lasting eight days, including transport, camping arrangements with all meals supplied, for the modest sum of £5-10-0 [= \$11.00]. It was organised by Maurice Harkins, an enterprising young man in the Tourist Bureau. Harkins, as is mentioned elsewhere, later became a member of the Committee of Management of the Park and ultimately Director of Tourist Development.

The camp-out received plenty of publicity both before and after the event. Charles Barrett, who will be remembered as a nature writer and journalist on the staff of the Melbourne *Herald*, was one of the party and he promised Kershaw that, on his return, he would write a series of articles on the Promontory for his newspaper.

Cripps was instructed to do whatever he could to assist the organisers. He was to make a special point of seeing that Barrett was made comfortable and given every facility for wandering around on foot while the rest of the tourists travelled on the riding hacks hired for the occasion.

Advance notice that the tour was being organised seems to have decided the Committee to re-open the Barry's Hill cottage and to install a second ranger. Accordingly, in October 1919 Fred Webber, a recently returned soldier, was appointed.

Most of the earlier appointments had been for a probationary period of three months but Webber's was for one month because he was not an experienced boatman. If he managed to master the art of navigating *Jessie* across the basin it was expected that his appointment would be confirmed.

Webber was more at home on a horse than on a motor launch but no doubt he persevered. With his sister as housekeeper he occupied the cottage for a few months, but by the following February he had resigned and was on his way to take up a block of land at Urangeline in the Riverina under the Soldier Settlement Scheme.

His brief stay at Barry's Creek was at a period when koalas were extremely abundant in the vicinity of the cottage. It was claimed that they were defoliating the trees so persistently that unless steps were taken to reduce the population the trees would soon be killed and the animals would die of starvation. To save them from this horrible fate the Committee approved the destruction of fifty. Webber was given the job of shooting them.

The public were not advised of this. Had people learned about it there certainly would have been an uproar.

The transfer of the koala Teddy Dincombe from the Promontory to Melbourne on the occasion of the Girls Camp-out in January 1920 brought down on the Committee the wrath of the Chief Inspector of Fisheries and Game, and there were some sharp exchanges before the Chairman of the Committee (Sir Baldwin Spencer) was able to convince the Chief Inspector that it was blameless. Had the newspapers got hold of the story of the Committee's methods of game management there is no telling what might have happened to it.

By December 1920 the surplus 'bears' were being sold at 10/- a head, but only to institutions which required them for re-stocking public wildlife reserves. Some were sent to Buchan Caves Park where they flourished until the next bushfire.

Sales were not very brisk and ultimately the 'bears' were allowed to go their own way, free from direct human intervention.

There is some doubt whether a colony of koalas in an area of more than 26,000 ha can become over-populated to such a degree as to actually destroy its own feed trees.

In 1942 there was much publicity given to the plight of the koalas on Quail Island in Westernport Bay. They had been introduced to the island some years earlier and, in the absence of predators, had multiplied to a number that threatened their existence. There were not enough food trees on the island for them and they starved. But for the intervention of the fisheries and Game Department Quail Island would have been a graveyard of hundreds of koalas. The emaciated survivors were transferred to other sanctuaries on the mainland and the island was left to recover from the effects of an overcrowded population of the



Darby River and Chalet, c.1922.

Photo courtesy Historic Places, Department of Sustainability and Environment, Victoria

animals. But Quail Island does not provide a good basis for comparison with the conditions existing on the Promontory.

On the island their freedom to move to fresh fields was decidedly limited. They were faced with starvation whether they moved on or stayed to eat what few leaves remained.

On the Promontory they were not so circumscribed. Their food trees grew in other places to which they had access, even though the supply would have been greatly diminished by fire. The animals were among the indigenes of the Promontory and it is reasonable to believe that the population levels in the scattered colonies had always fluctuated and become self-adjusting. Thus one is inclined to discount a suggestion which has been made that the forest of dead spars one can see today on the slopes to the north of Sealers Cove is due to koalas. It is much more likely that the eucalypts ran out of food, were killed by a fire or by a phenomenal dry spell or by some other natural cause unrelated to koalas, such as infestation by phasmids or some other insect in plague proportions.

With Webber's resignation Bill Cripps was once again on his own. He had married again in 1918, his second wife being a sister of Viv Weston who was to become

a Park Ranger a couple of years later—in October or November 1920.

During the several months which elapsed between Webber's departure and Weston's arrival Cripps's son Norman was put on the Committee's payroll as an Assistant Ranger.

The senior ranger's salary was increased to £3 a week and, as well as being an honorary Crown bailiff, he was given a further responsibility—that of honorary Inspector of Fisheries and Game, an appointment which invested him with some necessary authority to take action against those who infringed the Game Act outside the boundary of the National Park.

When Weston arrived Cripps went back to the comparative peace and quiet of his Barry's Creek cottage.

The summer of 1921–22 was marked by more than the usual number of bushfires in the Foster district which, of course, helped the Park finances through the consequent issue of grazing rights. The presence of cattle in the Park in summertime had the usual result.

Falls was blamed for a fire which started on his lease on Yanakie South. It spread across the boundary into the heathlands of the South-west Corner.

Another fire occurred on the Vereker Range, up near Paddy's Rock, and it moved down toward the Landing and rest hut. It was believed to have been started by one of the cattlemen while shifting stock through to Biddy's Camp.

Undismayed, the Committee had about 500 head of cattle in the Park in the following autumn.

In 1921 commenced a decade notable for developments in the domestic affairs of the Park. After some years of persuasion and agitation money was made available from various sources for the construction of a motor road to the Darby River, and in 1921 the road was opened for traffic.

It was still the old beach track but the approach had been re-routed. The new route followed the Fish Creek–Foster road to within less than a mile of the present Yanakie settlement and then turned west to Winchester's on Shallow Inlet. After negotiating some drift sand it embouched onto the beach and followed the almost traditional beach track for nearly six miles to a signposted turn-off which took the adventuring motorist over a pretty rough track beside Cotter's Lake and thence on to the heathy plains near the site of what was later to become the aerodrome. It then made its way through the sandhills down to No. 4 gate at the Darby bridge. It was only just a road but it was the forerunner of the better thing to come.

Jessie was still operating but badly in need of an overhaul. This she got in May 1921 but the job was poorly executed and the boat gave endless trouble for a long time to come.

Foxes were reported to be killing muttonbirds on Bennison Island. They were doing the same thing forty years later.

A wombat on Tongue Point was making a nuisance of himself by barging through the vermin proof fence.

A dingo was said to be operating in the Park and marksmen were eager to help in its destruction. An enormous wild dog was subsequently shot by George Cripps.

A Leathery Turtle was washed up on the Darby beach in August.

What had come to be called 'the Home Paddock' at the Darby was ploughed so that it could be sown down with grass seed. There were horses to be fed—Darby, Joan, Sue, Duncan and Kit—and something had to be done to provide green feed for them. Duncan was Selby's nag in 1909 so he doubtless deserved some special consideration in view of his long and faithful service.

The tea-tree and paper-bark were steadily retreating under the pressure of advancing tourist development.

Tin mining, despite objections by the Committee,



Building the Promontory entrance road, c.1928.

Photo courtesy Historic Places, Department of Sustainability and Environment, Victoria

was working up to a crescendo of activity. The syndicate put in its big pumping system. Sales of shares were improving. Mount Hunter was looking more and more like an elevated battlefield.

In July 1921 the Forestry plantation at Barry's Creek was formally abandoned. It had been an experiment which had proved something but who now remembers what?

In 1921 the Government grant to defray the Committee's expenses stood at £500 but it dropped to £400 in 1922, to £300 in 1923. In 1926 it was back to £500 at which level it remained until 1932 when it ceased altogether because of the Great Depression.

While it still stood at £500 the Committee was encouraged to contemplate the possibility of establishing the long-sought Government Chalet. It conceived the idea of extending its own cottage and, in May 1922, tenders were called for the job. The accepted contractor was T. Gordon who lost no time in completing the work.

In October 1923 the Chalet—eight bedrooms and accommodation for 25 to 30 guests—was open for business.

While this notable project was coming to fruition, lesser happenings might have been noted by an interested observer.

John King, the timberman of Metung, sought permission to cut out eucalypts, Blackwood and Myrtle-beech in the Park and the Committee must have granted the request because Dr J.A. Leach, who was acting secretary of the old National Parks Association which existed in those days, wrote a stiff letter to the Committee strongly objecting to the cutting of timber in the Park.

Ranger Bill Cripps, after almost ten years of service, retired in October 1922. He died at Toora on 9th April 1966 at the age of 95. His son and assistant of some



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two or three years standing—Norman—retired with him. However, the name remained on the Committee's payroll.

On Bill's recommendation, his younger brother George was appointed in his place and for rather more than two years George was the occupant of the Barry's Hill cottage.

His brother-in-law Viv. Weston was ensconced at the Darby but he came in for some censure in January 1923 because he allowed a fire to get out of control when he was burning a break near the Three Mile Beach. It spread across the Peninsula between Biddy's Camp, Mount Singapore and Mount Hunter down to the mustering paddock opposite Bennison Island. The paddock had been fenced in 1919 by Hall, one of the licensed graziers.

Meanwhile the Committee was busily occupied in planning for the grand opening of the Chalet. Tassell of Fish Creek agreed to act as a kind of transport agent. He undertook to carry visitors from Fish Creek to Shallow Inlet by car for 30/- and from there to the Darby by horse for 20/-. The fare there and back made a holiday on the Prom a somewhat expensive undertaking for campers who, up to that time, were the only class of visitor who could be accommodated there. The rest huts were proving so popular that it was decided to make an overnight charge of 1/- a head or £1 a week for parties.

The hardier campers who happened to choose the autumn of 1923 for their visit to the Park would have found the huts a particular comfort. About ten inches (254 mm) of rain fell at the Darby River during April and May!

During the winter about 750 head of cattle were ranging over the accustomed grazing leases—mowing down the lush growth which the autumn rains had produced in the burned areas.

Native animals were still being introduced into the Park. The 1923 introductions included two Rat Kangaroos and three or four Bandicoots which were released south of the Darby saddle. Early in the following year two Nail-tailed Wallabies were brought in.

Since 1909 the Railways Department had provided free transport to the railhead at Fish Creek for all native animals consigned to the National Park—a generous gesture which the Committee gratefully accepted.

Mrs Elizabeth Weston, wife of the ranger, was granted a six month lease of the newly built chalet as from the 1st November and during this time Weston was relieved of his duties as ranger. His place was taken by a single man, Arthur Irving—a nephew of the Winchesters of Shallow Inlet.

While the 'season' lasted the Chalet enjoyed some distinguished patronage. In the Christmas holidays a party of members of the Field Naturalists' Club came to enjoy a stay in the park and, of course, stayed at the Chalet.

In February a large party on a holiday tour arranged by the Tourist Bureau came to enjoy its hospitable comfort. Like the naturalists they came by boat to the Vereker landing.

In March the Governor General and Lady Forster, with their entourage, came on an informal visit. They travelled along the beach track and, on the way, were entertained at afternoon tea by the Winchester brothers. At the Chalet the Westons and Irving made the Vice Regal party so much at home that the Committee was asked to convey to them the appreciation of the Governor General and his lady.

While all was bright and gay at the Darby the Singapore Peninsula was in the throes of some tribulation. The tin mines on Mount Hunter had attracted a good deal of attention from reputable investors but the miners themselves were not regarded with much favour by the Committee. Some of their visitors were held in even less regard—those who came across for some good weekend shooting. The pastime became so blatant that ranger George Cripps was instructed to go across to the mines, seize the guns and take the names and addresses of those who were breaking the Park regulations. It is not recorded how many guns he seized nor how many names and addresses were taken.

In April he was given another difficult assignment—to find out who set fire to Bennison Island.

The year 1923 was of some significance to the Committee because it was the year in which the Falls brothers' lease of the Yanakie South blocks expired. The land was resumed by the Crown and thereafter became part of the Yanakie Common.

The No. 2 gate into the Park was closed so that the Promontory graziers were no longer able to pass into the former Block 74. This meant that the Committee would have to build another gate—in a position which would allow traffic to bypass the 90-acre swamp.

George Cripps resigned at the end of 1924 and A.O. Miller took his place as from 1st January 1925.

He came at a time when the growing popularity of the Park was producing some not altogether desirable consequences.

Poaching had become a serious problem which was beyond the present resources of the three rangers, Weston, Irving and Miller, to stamp out. So long as the Mount Hunter mines operated so would poachers find there something akin to sanctuary.

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The miners themselves were not exactly 'striking it lucky'. Even so the Lands Department was still receiving applications for the right to prospect and mine for tin and the Committee continued to object to the granting of the rights and the renewal of licences. But the days of the lessees were numbered. By July 1925 Beck, the manager of the Mount Hunter Tin Mining Company, was offering to sell the Company's buildings to the Committee. By September the mines had closed and poaching fell away to a normal level.

In January 1925 two new shelter huts were ready for use by tourists—one at Sealers Cove, the other at Tidal River. The latter structure lasted about seven years before it was destroyed by fire.

Later in the year the shelter hut at the Darby was moved close to the Chalet and rebuilt as a cottage for the Westons. Mrs Weston again took over the lease for the coming tourist season and about this time her husband retained his job as ranger. The Committee must have considered him more useful as a ranger than as the Chalet factotum.

In August the *Awaroa* was wrecked near the entrance to Shallow Inlet and the Committee bought the rights to its cargo of timber for a nominal sum. With a good stock of Tasmanian building board on hand the Committee could look forward to achieving its plan to extend the Chalet but, as it transpired, the chronic trouble, shortage of funds, delayed its realisation for some three years.

When the Mount Hunter mines closed most of the cabins and equipment were removed but the miners, true to tradition, left the holes and scars to be attended to by someone else.

The Mines Department was asked to see that the holes and shafts were filled. Ranger Alf. Miller was sent to inspect and report on the scene and he averred that there were at least 37 open shafts ranging from four to thirty feet in depth, and bore holes from four to eight inches in diameter were scattered about.

Some shafts were more dangerous than others because they had been closed with boards deceptively covered with a veneer of soil. An exchange of correspondence between secretary Kershaw and the Mines Department continued for what must have seemed an interminable time to the Committee. In the end, some time in 1929 the rangers were detailed to fill them in.

It seems reasonably certain that no serious accidents to uninformed tourists occurred on Mount Hunter during the long interval of masterly inactivity. A few animals might have lost their lives by tumbling into the holes but such accidents would have been among the least of the Committee's worries.

When the State Governor, Lord Stradbroke, and his wife visited the Park in December 1925 they were steered clear of Mount Hunter. Their Excellencies were taken to Tongue Point, Tidal River, Oberon Bay, the Lighthouse, Lilly Pilly Gully and Sealers' Cove. They were also treated to a boat trip on the Inlet.

The visit must have exhausted the Committee's coffers because no funds were left to retain a third ranger. Irving was the victim of the 'recession' and Miller was brought across from Barry's Hill for a while to take his place at the Darby.

In December 1926 construction of the new Yanakie–Darby River road was commenced. With the prospect of a greater flow of visitors to the Park the Committee decided to again extend the Chalet building to provide increased accommodation. The work was completed in time for the opening of the 1928 season but, in the meanwhile, Mrs Weston had relinquished her lease in favour of her assistant, Miss Nicoll. Her future husband, George Butler, was engaged in track cutting and maintenance work in the Park and he was helped by Alf Miller's son Jack.

Weston resigned in April 1927, after six years service as a ranger, to become Lands Officer at Yanakie—a job he held for several years. His place as ranger was taken by Ken Fuller of Melton who proved to be a difficult man to work with. In no time he was at holts with his predecessor, to the discomfort of both Weston and the Committee. However, there was work to be done and it was the job of Miller and Fuller to do it.

On Fuller's appointment Miller returned to the Barry's Hill cottage from whence he made his sallies to Mount Hunter. Fuller occupied himself in the Darby sector. In the summer they had the usual preoccupation—the fear of fires and in mid-December their fears were realised. The Caretaker of Yanakie, in burning off the Common, had let the fire get out of control. It spread into the Vereker Range and around the Darby River flats up to Tongue Point and out to Mount Latrobe—a most unfortunate happening in the midst of the tourist season. Later in the summer, visitors to the Darby suffered another but more unusual trial—a plague of fleas.

Wherever dogs (and cats) roam in company with human beings their parasites go with them. The cattlemen's dogs would certainly have carried the normal complement of fleas and the cool shady spots beneath the Chalet would have provided good resting places for any of the dogs passing through on mustering duty. Every scratch would have released a shower of flea eggs from the thousands deposited in the fur of the dogs by the hundreds of fecund female fleas.

During a long spell of dry weather the contribution to the pool of eggs could become colossal. Normally flea



Sealers Creek valley after bushfire, 1930s.  
Photo courtesy Historic Places, Department of Sustainability and Environment, Victoria

eggs will lie for a while unhatched in cool dry sand but as soon as the right conditions of warmth and humidity occur they hatch into lively little larvae which feed voraciously on whatever organic matter they can find. When fully grown the grubs pupate and as pupae they can exist for months without losing their viability. For the adult flea to emerge from its pupa conditions have to be just right. The temperature and humidity must be nicely adjusted but, even more important, there must be sufficient disturbance to 'shake them out of their skins' so to say.

No doubt such a combination of circumstances occurred at the Darby River in January and February 1928. Fortunately such flea population 'explosions' are uncommon and generally of brief duration. The disappearance of the insects can usually be hastened by a few elementary procedures in hygiene.

The indigenous biting midges or 'sandflies' were a much greater nuisance than the fleas. They enjoy a longer 'season', are much more widely distributed and can exist independently of man and his animals. When human beings are about, the tiny flies make their presence felt by a far more enduringly irritating 'bite' than any flea can administer and there was, in times gone by, little anyone could do to eradicate the pests or mitigate the nuisance. Visitors to the Chalet did their best to repel them by a method which still has its devotees.

It so happens that sandflies dislike smoke even more than do those they like to feed upon so the guests of the Chalet were quick to accept the recommendation that they should collect dried cow dung and burn it. The inexperienced guest must have thought it odd to see his fellow guests arriving back at the Chalet at dusk laden with slabs of dried manure and then, after igniting their collection, sitting on the edge of the long verandahs enveloped in a cloud of more or less aromatic smoke. Fortunately in temperate zones not every year is a plague year and biting midges, like the fleas, tend to multiply to unwelcome proportions only occasionally.

Miss Nicoll, the new lessee of the Chalet, ran the business very competently and the Committee was satisfied that she would carry on during the next season when a bigger and better Chalet was promised—on a two year lease. The remodelled building, with eight bedrooms, an enlarged kitchen and an additional bathroom was completed in August 1928 and re-opened on 1st November. Miss Nicoll had, by that time, become Mrs George Butler.

The new road was completed too but some severe September gales destroyed long stretches of the boarded track over the Hummocks. This made it more than usually hazardous for motorists, some of whom finished axle deep in drift sand. Road maintenance was not one of the normal duties of a National Park ranger but Fuller and Miller with what help they could get did their best to keep open for traffic that part of it which was within the Park. If the Hummocks were successfully negotiated a good run of five or six miles along the hard sandy beach brought the traveller to the signposted turn-off inland just before he reached Buckley's Rocks. The beach road could go no further unless the tide was out because the rocks sprawled out into the sea. From the Rocks it ploughed through fairly firm sand, circumnavigated Cotter's Lake (which was more of a large swampy claypan than a lake) from whence it meandered through groves of Sheoaks and Tea-tree down to the Darby River bridge.

The September gales did more than damage the new road. With the help of a king tide they pushed the Promontory's tidal rivers upstream. The Darby spread out over the flats and completely covered the 'kangaroo paddock'.

The 'paddock' had seen some vicissitudes since it was first cleared of tea-tree and paper-bark. Part of it was the site of Mathison's orchard way back in 1912. Later, another portion of it became the grazing paddock for the ranger's domestic stock. Then it was ploughed and sown down to provide fodder for the Park horses and finally a couple of kangaroos and emus were let loose in it for the benefit of such guests at the Chalet as failed to notice the animals in the rest of the Park.

In November 1928 the Committee decided to charge a camping fee. Much had been done to make the lot of the camper more attractive and comfortable and no small effort had been made to provide him with tracks which he could follow in safety to the many scenic spots in the National Park. Alf. Miller had restored the Sealers' Cove trail and even rebuilt the bridge over Sealers' Creek.

When not occupied in such maintenance work he tended to the boat *Jessie* which he, as successor to George Cripps and his predecessors, ran to and from Port Welshpool for provisions, supplies and furniture

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for both the Chalet and himself. Having brought them to the Vereker landing he then carted them across to the Darby in the official wagon.

The Committee purchased most of its supplies from the Great Southern Co-operative Company at Foster. The manager of the Company for some years was A. J. Fraser who, in 1957, became Minister of State Development and Chairman of the National Parks Authority—the panel of men who at that time shaped the destiny of all of Victoria’s national parks. The Company gave the Committee no special concessions despite the fact that it was a prompt paying and good customer. Eventually it sought the discount which was customarily given to most business houses in those days to account customers. There is nothing to suggest that the Company complied with the request.

Now the new road was through, the boat, jetty and wagon were becoming little used by visitors to the Park. Even the rest hut at the Vereker landing was falling into a decline so the Committee decided to sell *Jessie* if it could find a buyer and move the rest hut if it could find a more suitable site.

*Jessie* was sold in May 1930 but the rest hut remained where it was until destroyed by a bushfire some years later.

The year 1929 brought with it several problems.

In March a careless hirer foundered one of the horses in the treacherous bog along the telephone line track to Tidal River. Fuller destroyed it and got into trouble for lending it.

In May a contract was let for the rebuilding of the old mustering paddock fence—an important project in the eyes of the Committee and justified by the requirements of its grazing activities.

The new road was not as good as it might have been. After a few mishaps to tourists’ vehicles and to the car of a visiting V.I.P. the Public Works Department was prevailed upon to divert it on to higher ground as it skirted Cotter’s Lake beside the horse paddock fence. By October the job was finished.

Despite the diversion it still presented difficulties. The Governor and party, on the way down for a brief holiday, got bogged in the sand in two places. Miller, with the help of Butler, managed to make it a little safer for the next comers.

They were becoming quite experienced road construction and maintenance men. Grimshaw, the Royal Mail contractor, must have welcomed the slight improvement. It was the mail that led to friction between Butler and Fuller and ultimately to the departure of Fuller in December 1929. The trouble caused the Committee to have the telephone removed from the ranger’s cottage to the Chalet. The

contretemps had another consequence. Poor Alf Miller was wrenched from his solitude at Barry’s Hill and installed at the Darby—for the time being. The ‘time being’ was for some seven months by the end of which time George Butler had been appointed to replace Fuller.

The Governor came at an inopportune time—just when the autumn burns were being conducted on the Common. From the Cotter’s Lake area one of the fires moved on towards the Darby and was stopped only by the tireless efforts of Alf. Miller.

The Committee, or at least Kershaw, appeared to be most concerned at the destruction of at least sixty posts of the mustering paddock fence. A rather tart note to the Lands Department brought an unexpected response. The Department proposed that it should take over the Committee’s grazing business, which was only another way of suggesting that the Park might as well be recognised as just another Common functioning for the good of the public as it had functioned thirty or forty years earlier.

The Committee declined to cooperate despite the fact that McIver, the Secretary for Lands, happened to be a member of the Committee at that time. He died shortly afterwards.

When Butler took up his duties as Ranger in July 1930 Miller gratefully returned to Barry’s Hill, but not for long.

It had been decided to shift his headquarters to the Southwest Corner. The old rest hut was to be reconstructed as a residence. What happened was that the 30’ x 10’ shed at Barry’s Hill was moved to the Landing. The rebuilt edifice was the structure which became known to a generation of visitors to the Park as ‘Miller’s Hut’. Part of its chimney still stands as grim reminder of the ferocity of a bushfire as well as relic which recalls the romantic days when the Vereker Landing was the port of arrival for practically all visitors to the National Park.

The year 1931 was notable for two happenings beside the destruction of the Tidal River hut. A gentleman from Foster, Mr White, discovered a human skeleton in the vicinity of Buckley’s Rocks. The find aroused a good deal of interest and speculation at the time. Were the bones the remains of one of Bass’s Glennie Island convicts? – a forgotten and unknown pioneer? – a victim of some unrecorded tragedy? – or an Aborigine?

The more expert opinion settled for the last-named, which was a perfectly reasonable opinion.

About one mile of the beach frontage from the Old Homestead block 72 to the northern end of Cotter’s Lake was one of several favoured camp sites of the



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group of Aborigines who roamed the Yanakie sandhills in days long since past. As a consequence there had been built up, bit by bit, an enormous repository of their artefacts, shells, animal bones, cinders from camp fires and suchlike evidences of their occupation. Unquestionably some would have died there and, of course, would have been buried in the nearby sand.

The other happening was the discontinuance of the Government grant. It dropped from £500 to nothing.

The Committee had to depend for revenue on the forty pounds it received from Mrs Butler plus about £500 it got from grazing fees, a few pounds from horse hire and camping fees and what it could get from the Unemployed Relief Council.

During the ensuing unhappy years many men, encouraged by government assistance, went prospecting and mining in the hope of earning enough to keep their families together. Gold mining country was the main target but places reputed to hold other minerals were not neglected. The Promontory tin 'prospects' were remembered. Undeterred by the disappointments of Richardson, Blakeley, Hotstone, Freeman and all those who had gone before, newcomers thought it worth another try and applied for leases on Mount Hunter.

The Committee stuck to its guns and objected to any further leases being granted.

Towards the end of 1932 a new slant was put on the thirst for knowledge of the mineralogy of the Park. A party of prospectors wanted to look for osmiridium. Had it been twenty years later the search would have been for uranium or thorium!

Although it resisted the granting of any further mining leases it gave in to the extent of giving permission for one man to prospect for tin. The prospector, McLeade, didn't do any better than his predecessors.

An interesting development began to take shape in 1932. What must surely have been one of the last of Victoria's bullock teams was brought down to the Darby to commence the job of putting in a vehicle track to Tidal River. The work ceased before very much had been achieved. The Committee ran out of funds but got some more later on and the work was resumed in October 1933, using unemployed labour instead of the bullock team. It must be supposed that its construction was part of a general plan for development of the Park. No prescience on the part of the Committee could have caused it to anticipate the use to which it was to be put ten years later, nor later still when Tidal River was to become the hub of the Park.

Its immediate purpose was to provide ready access to some of the State's spectacular coastal scenery

and, incidentally, to make it a little easier to protect it from fire. The Park needed all the protection it could be given. In the summer of 1932 a fire, started by the telephone linemen, burned up to Oberon from the lighthouse.

As prosperity returned to the country the grey days of the Park faded. The Tidal River road was gradually improved and widened. By the time the A.M.F. was ready to occupy the Park it was in a good serviceable condition.

The Chalet 'takings' rose again to its pre-depression level and the Committee's interest in restocking the Park with native fauna revived.

In December 1933 a Jew Lizard and a Fat-tailed Pouched Mouse were presented to the Committee. In March of the following year it received four Lesser Flying Phalangiers and a Sugar Glider. In May 1935 the Bird Observers' Club, in response to an appeal from Secretary Kershaw, produced a number of Bell Miners which were released at Sealers Cove. In October 1936 another kind donor presented a Major Mitchell Cockatoo and this gift seems to have started the Committee toying with the idea of having an aviary built as a companion to its kangaroo paddock. Fortunately better counsels must have prevailed and the aviary did not eventuate.

In 1938 Ranger George Butler ended an association with the Park which had lasted almost seven years. He left in an atmosphere of tragedy. His wife and children were drowned in the Darby River. The Park has been singularly free of such tragic happenings although twelve years later a walker, A.B. Howe, vanished between Refuge and Sealers Coves. He was never seen again.

Butler was succeeded by Carl Mortensen, and Mr and Mrs Leigh Russell took over the lease of the Chalet.

The Russells were initiated into the practices of the Prom by a fire which came within half a mile of the Chalet. It burned out several acres of heathland and grass trees on Darby Hill. In the spring of 1939 the grass trees and leek orchids responded by flowering in profusion in a place where it would have been difficult to find a flowering grass tree or orchid during the spring of the previous year. It is a phenomenon frequently observed by those who interest themselves in the habits of wildflowers. The little terrestrial orchids can survive without flowering for many seasons. The taller bushes grow up around their habitat and take from the soil the nourishment needed to stimulate the orchids into flowering and hide them from the sunlight which for many species is just as essential if they are to flower. A bushfire sweeps away the ground gloom and returns to the soil the minerals which the shrubs have extracted and concentrated in their leaves and stems. The orchid

tubers grow fat and well nourished and expend their overflowing energy in a riot of flowers, followed by millions—yes, literally millions—of seeds some of which, if their good luck holds, germinate and ensure the continuance of the species. In the spring of 1939 the Darby Hill was just such a riot of flowering herbaceous plants with Tall Leek-orchids, Spider Orchids, Sun Orchids, Greenhoods and Double-tails conspicuous among them. It could not have been entirely due to the fire though, because in other places where there had been no recent burns orchids flowered well. More than thirty species were found in the Park during a week's hunting by an enthusiastic observer during mid-September of that year.

A personality who became known to thousands of visitors to the Park came on the scene in December. John Sparkes, one of Lester's cattlemen, was appointed at £4 a week to take charge of the Park horses for eight weeks. In his spare time he was expected to keep the motor road to Tidal River in good repair and assist Mortensen to look after the camp sites at Darby River, Tidal River, Oberon Bay and Picnic Bay.

At the end of the eight weeks his appointment was extended and he was being referred to as the Assistant Ranger.

The Chalet was enjoying unprecedented popularity. The Rangers were kept as busy as they had ever been. The Committee began to contemplate further improvements to the Chalet. It was to be extended to accommodate eighty guests.

By the summer of 1940 work on the Yanakie aerodrome was under way. The contractors, busily clearing the heathy vegetation and tea tree scrub, used the traditional technique of firing it and what better time to burn scrub than mid-summer? Fortunately it spread no further than the horse paddock!

In the following March Alf Miller was told of his approaching transfer to Darby River but he let it be understood that he would prefer to resign, which he did in April after more than fifteen years of service—a period to be exceeded only by his successor, John Sparkes, who was asked to continue as assistant ranger on a week to week basis at £3 a week with accommodation provided.

When Miller departed in mid-April Sparkes was offered the job of ranger on a permanent basis, and he accepted.

By June 1940 the Second World War was beginning to make its impact on the National Park and its small human population.

Leigh Russell had decided to enlist and, as a consequence, Mrs Russell did not seek to renew her lease of the Chalet. Mrs P.S. Clendenning of

Foster succeeded her as lessee.

The lady had a good deal to contend with before she could contemplate receiving guests. Household equipment needed either restoration or replacement and the place required fumigation to rid it of the bed bug *Cimex lectularius*—a ubiquitous foreign element of the present-day Australian insect fauna whose arrival on the Promontory could scarcely have been anticipated by the Committee of Management of the National Park. The guests at the Chalet certainly regarded the things with disfavour.

Bed bugs are neither more nor less revolting than any other of the natural Order Hemiptera. It just happens that they customarily feed on human blood, a habit they share with some fleas, lice and mosquitoes, and they are odorous creatures.

In the autumn of 1940 another alien introduction—this time a pest plant—began to make its presence evident in the Park. Ragwort (*Senecio jacobaea*) was noticed to be spreading at Barry's Hill. However, about the same time, an observation of happier import related to the Five Mile Beach area of the north eastern sector where koalas were reported by cattlemen to exist in large numbers. Mortensen and Sparkes were instructed to investigate the report but, although much time was spent in exploring the locality in an endeavour to locate the big colony, they did not discover it. Nevertheless a few small outliers of the alleged main colony were seen—perhaps about fifty or sixty in all.

It will be recalled that about twenty years earlier koalas were superabundant at Barry's Creek. The survivors of that colony seemed to have migrated to new feeding grounds but just where those grounds were nobody knew. Possibly their 'promised land' was across the peninsula to the east of Chinaman's Creek. At any rate, here they were established in 1940. The fires which, in the intervening years had passed through the area, had surely left unburned enclaves where the remnant of the colony could recover its strength. As the environs recovered after those fires the regrowth would have allowed a gradual extension of their feeding grounds to accommodate their increasing number. That colony, by now, will have again diminished.

Its reservoir will have moved on towards Sealers Cove, then on towards Refuge Cove, to Waterloo Bay, and gradually back along the backbone ranges to Mount Vereker and on to Barry's Creek to complete the full cycle of its peregrinations.

Under the best of circumstances Wilsons Promontory National Park would be the ideal place for such a pilgrims' progress. An assured food supply would be there, awaiting the advance guard of the colony about to be established. Unfortunately the unnatural frequency of fires has made the place

far from ideal—and worse was yet to come.

It happened in January 1941 when the Army proposed to occupy the whole of the Park. With some misgiving the Committee acquiesced. The military authorities agreed to the Committee retaining its two rangers whose job would be to keep an eye on the native fauna. Their salaries would be paid by the Army but they would remain under the control of the Committee. The Army also agreed to pay £300 a year during the period of occupation. It was given the option of buying the nineteen Park horses or of hiring them for £9 per head per annum. It agreed to maintain and insure all Park buildings and their contents and to make good any losses or damage. Such permanent buildings as the Defence Department might build were to become the property of the Committee at the end of the occupation.

The Committee retained the right of entry as well as the right to introduce such flora and fauna as it might think fit and it persuaded the Army to agree not to damage unnecessarily tea-tree and other trees and shrubs and to use only dead timber for firewood. Mrs. Clendenning's lease also came to an abrupt end. She was the last of the Chalet lessees.

On 1st February 1941 the National Park was closed to the public. Secretary Kershaw came down for a last survey of his beloved Park and, on his return, mentioned having seen platypus in Tidal River.

That interesting monotreme is by no means restricted to freshwater streams. It can tolerate moderate salinity and has been observed often enough in tidal streams but it was of some interest to know that the animal was an inhabitant of the Promontory.

In May Lester's grazing lease, for which he paid £350 per annum, expired and, since the Committee could not renew it, the Army agreed to make good the loss of revenue.

The invasion by the trainees had not yet reached its peak and in September the rangers were able to report that kangaroos, wallabies and emus were noticeably abundant but, as the military population increased, the density of the native fauna decreased.

In the following year the pleasures of the chase were, for a short time, supplemented by the joys of the cup. The grounding of a freighter off Waratah Bay brought an unexpected windfall of liquor and tobacco to the inhabitants of the district and the army came in for its share of the jetsam. Army training so it is said was disorganised for a fortnight!

The old cottage at Barry's Hill was still there. For some time past it had been used, for a small consideration, by Lester and his employees. When his lease expired the cottage was closed for the last time. In

February 1942 a big fire raced in from Yanakie and in its passage through the Mount Vereker and Barry's Creek areas on its way to Mount Ramsay and Mount Latrobe it devoured the building. The same fire wrote finis to the old vermin-proof fence as well. Almost one mile of it, from the South-west Corner to No. 1 Gate, was burned. The rest was destroyed by subsequent fires.

To protect its installations the Army deliberately fired the Darby Hill behind the Chalet but who started the main fire is not recorded.

In January of the previous year Mortensen had advised the Committee of his intention to enlist. He was not accepted for army service but joined the Civil Construction Corps and so was lost to the Park service. Although his job was kept open for him he never returned to the Park.

The Committee felt his departure the more because the Army's compensatory contribution was reduced by an amount corresponding to Mortensen's salary.

It was not until about August 1943 that the Committee learned anything conclusive about Mortensen's future. In the meantime, as it was essential that a Ranger should be in the Park, John Sparkes was promoted in July 1942 to fill the vacancy.

In September of the following year he was appointed honorary Crown Bailiff and thus assumed the mantle of his predecessors. The senior ranger had, almost from the beginning, held this important post.

The domestic history of the National Park was almost a closed book until 1946 when the Army decided to vacate it. It was restored to the people as from 1st February 1946.

A fortnight later Secretary James Kershaw died.

Slowly normality returned to the Promontory but the Park was on the eve of a new era. All but one of the original Committee had passed on. Arthur Mattingley, now an old man, was the survivor of the team of men which in 1908 had accepted its responsibilities with enthusiasm and optimism. One by one their places had been taken by new men with new ideas. Imperceptibly the policy of management had changed with the changing years. Nature conservation had long been the guiding principle—in theory, if not in practice—but lack of funds had always limited any expansive programs directed towards really conservative measures. The 'improvements' which were effected invariably aimed at attracting tourists to the Park, not with the intention of merely having numbers of people wandering about the place more or less aimlessly but with seeing eyes: eyes that would see and understand that in Wilsons Promontory National Park they had a wonderful asset which it was in their hands to protect and preserve for all time. But alas, there was no one to interpret

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the place for them. No guides, no guide books, no nature trails, no wayside museum, no fireside talks by competent naturalists, little or nothing to tell one what the Park was for, what it meant to the present and could mean to future generations of citizens and scientists. Has all that been changed with the arrival of the new era? With sadness it must be said that the answer is No.





## Chapter 9: Native Plants and Animals Introduced to the Prom

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The Committee of Management, soon after its appointment, adopted a policy of stocking the National Park with native animals and plants of a kind which were believed to be either in danger of extinction or rare enough to warrant special effort to increase their number. It was anticipated that in time, the Promontory would become the place of sanctuary for Australia's vanishing wildlife.

There was no simple way of gathering and transporting flora and fauna from more remote habitats safely to the sanctuary, consequently only a small variety of species of animal was released into the park.

During a period of a little over thirty years not much more than 270 beasts were released, which included 27 mammal and reptile species and nine species of bird. Sixty species of trees and shrubs were introduced either as seeds or seedlings. The following list includes all the introduced species of animal and plant for which records have been located. Some of those names, signified by the symbol #, were known to be indigenes of the Park, but, perhaps, it was considered that the existing population needed reinforcement. There was always the possibility that the introduction of a fresh strain would have an invigorating effect on the indigenous strain although it was equally possible that it would have the reverse effect.

Other species were brought into a habitat to which was they were utterly unsuited and, naturally, they failed to survive. In a few instances the introduction must have been made more in a spirit of politeness than in accordance with planned policy. One animal on its own, unless it happens to be a pregnant female, will obviously never establish the foundations of a family yet, on several occasions, single specimens were accepted as gifts and released.

Donors would not have concerned themselves overmuch with the sex of the animals caught or trapped and consequently it may be safely assumed that the odds would have been in favour of even pairs being both females.

It is not possible to make a reliable assessment of the degree of success of these experiments in acclimatisation because no systematic study of faunal populations has been undertaken since 1905. However, an observation at Refuge Cove in the summer of 1960–61 has revealed at least one success – the Bell Miner was seen and heard.

Those who made the observation were not aware that it had been introduced into the Park in 1935 and merely reported it as one of the denizens of a timbered gully in that area.

It is significant that the birds have derived not from a pair but from a small colony of nine – a number which vastly increased the prospect of survival of the species.

As a result it appears that the Bell Miner has been able to survive the vicissitudes of some 35 years.

It is a pity that Victoria's only endemic bird [and avian fauna emblem], the Helmeted Honeyeater, could not have been settled there. It will be a miracle if it survives another fifty years in its diminished and much abused habitat on Cardinia Creek at Yellingbo.

Of the sixty species of plant said to have been introduced into the Park only 43 native species are accounted for in the list given below. The sixty may have included the several alien plants deliberately brought in for one reason or another.

Only seven species were brought in as growing plants and these were carefully tended for a while.

Some of them lingered on for a few years but whether any at all became really established has yet to be determined.

According to Professor Ewart each packet of seeds represented at least the different plantings 'in suitable selected localities' - sheltered places in the gullies of the Vereker Range (seeds of the Grampians Gum were planted on the summit of the various peaks of the range) and along the tracks to Barry's Creek where *Callitris*, *Hardenbergia*, *Kennedya* and *Melaleuca* were sown. *Pittosporum*, *Tristania* and *Lomatia* were sown along the banks of the creek and its adjacent streams but if they ever came to anything they were doubtless grubbed out when the Forests Department got really started on its plantation along the course of Barry's Creek.

Most of the eucalypt seeds went to the northern slopes of the Vereker Range towards Corner Basin and on the western slopes towards the Darby River flats.

The Professor explained that as the plantings were done during the day's march, it was not possible to keep a precise record of the locality of each separate bed of seeds and, he added optimistically, 'the appearance of the plants later on will be the best evidence of their establishment.'

This planting of seeds was a wasted effort.

Nature does not commonly distribute seeds in the quantity held in a seedsman's packet. A seeding plant may drop hundreds of thousands of seeds within a few square yards - enough to feed all the insects and birds which live on them and still leave a few to germinate. In a place where multitudes of foraging insects are on the lookout for anything in the way of nourishing food a few seeds planted at random in the bush have little prospect of passing the seedling stage even if they escape being devoured before they germinate. Even the attention given to the Forests Department's plantation at Barry's Creek was not enough nor sufficiently well planned to ensure success.



A group returns to the Darby Chalet after walking to Lilly Pilly Gully c. 1925.  
Photo courtesy Historic Places, Department of Sustainability and Environment, Victoria

A lot more is now known about the technique of growing Australian plants but it is hoped that future managers of the National Park will concentrate their efforts on maintaining the associations already existing in the Park and not spoil the place by attempting to establish something akin to a botanic garden. There are already too many non-indigenous plants there now and, unfortunately, the majority of them are aliens or cosmopolitan weeds which have no really useful function in preserving the natural ecological associations of the region. Indeed, some of them constitute a distinctly greater fire hazard than any of the more appropriate native species.

By far the best available means of ensuring the continuity of a biotic community is to preserve its environs in their entirety and this can be achieved only in a spacious reserve which will include the community and, as well, buffer it against the untoward effects of what occurs on the periphery.

Five species were planted on Do Boy Island - two Golden Wattles, two Sunshine Acacias, two Mahogany Gums in December 1912 and an unknown number of Coast Tea-trees and Pines (presumably native Cypress Pines) in the winter of the following year. One seedling

of each of the three species first mentioned was planted near the rest hut which once stood at the Southwest Corner. They do not appear to be there now, nor does the Cabbage Palm which thrived in Lilly Pilly Gully for at least nine years. Quite possibly it lived on until 1943 when the gully was burned out.

### Birds liberated in the Park

Emu (*Dromaius novae-hollandiae*) – a few young birds in June, 1909; six birds in Nov. 1909; two from Creswick in March, 1912; one in April, 1912; one from Maryborough in Aug. 1912; two in Nov. 1912; twelve purchased in Oct. 1912; one donated in Nov. 1914.

Lowan [Malleefowl] (*Leipoa acellata*) – four in June 1915.

White Ibis (*Threskiornis molucca*) – six in Nov. 1918.

Straw-necked Ibis (*Threskiornis spinacollis*) – six in Nov. 1918.

Lyrebird (*Menura novae-hollandiae*) – two females and one male in Aug. 1910; one male and one female donated by Freeman in Oct. 1911; two females in Oct. 1912. Most of the birds were trapped in the

forest gullies of the Hoddle Ranges.  
 Satin Bower-bird (*Ptilonorhynchus violaceus*) – five birds were brought in from Gellibrand by Falls.  
 Bell Miner (*Mahorina melanophris*) – nine birds were collected by members of the Bird Observers' Club and liberated in the Park in May 1933.  
 Pink Cockatoo or Major Mitchell Cockatoo (*Kakatoa leadbeateri*) – one bird from an unnamed donor.  
 Wonga Pigeon (*Leucosarcia melanoleuca*) – believed to have been liberated in the Park but the date and number are unknown.

### Reptiles liberated in the Park:

Murray River Tortoise (*Emydura macquarriae*) – date of liberation and number not ascertainable. The reptiles were placed in Lilly Pilly Gully.  
 Jew Lizard (*Amphibolurus barbatus*) – one specimen donated in December 1933.

### Mammals liberated in the Park:

Scrub or Grey Kangaroo (*Macropus major*) – a pair in 1910 and seven from Woodside in August 1912.  
 Red Kangaroo (*Macropus rufus*) – three from Deniliquin in May 1914.  
 Euro or Woodward's Kangaroo (*Macropus robustus* var. *woodwardii*) – liberated prior to July 1914. Number not known.  
 Rufous Rat Kangaroo (*Aepyprymnus rufescens*) – two liberated south of the Darby Saddle in May 1923.  
 Plain or Queensland Rock Wallaby (*Petrogale inornata*). Unknown number liberated in May 1913.  
 Black-striped Wallaby (*Wallabia dorsalis*). Unknown number liberated prior to June 1914.  
 Brush or Red-necked Wallaby (*Wallabia rufogrisea*). Unknown number liberated between April 1911 and July 1914.  
 Rufous-bellied or Flinders Island Wallaby. (*Thylogale billardieri*). Unknown number liberated 1909.  
 Nail-tailed Wallaby (probably *Onychogalia fraenata*) – two liberated in January 1924.  
 Dusky or Bennett's Tree Kangaroo (*Dendrolagus bennettianus*) – neither date of liberation or number ascertainable.  
 Common Eastern Wombat (*Phascolomys mitchelli*) – one donated by Crawford in May 1910; four donated by Thomson of Kinglake in June 1910.  
 King Island wombat (*Wombatus ursinus*) – unknown number liberated in May 1910.  
 #Long-nosed Bandicoot (*Parameles nasuta*) – two from

in May 1923 and liberated south of the Darby Saddle.  
 Gunn's Striped Bandicoot (*Parameles gunnii*) – unknown number liberated in 1923.  
 #Common Grey or Brush-tail Possum (*Trichosurus vulpeculus*) – two from Quinney of Mortlake in January 1911; four from Elmore in March, 1914. These latter were liberated in Lilly Pilly Gully.  
 Tasmanian Black Possum (*Trichosurus fuliginosus*) - an unknown number liberated in both September 1913 and August 1914.  
 #Ring-tail Possum (*Pseudocheirus laniginosus*) – neither date nor number ascertainable.  
 Short-eared Mountain Possum (*Trichosurus caninus*) – neither date nor number ascertainable.  
 Dormouse Possum (*Dromicia concinna*) – unknown number liberated in March 1934.  
 Fat-tailed Pouched Mouse (*Sminthopsis crassicaudata*) – one donated by Brazenor of Melbourne in December 1933.  
 Greater Glider (*Schoinabates volans*) – one liberated in the Vereker Range in February 1929; one liberated in March 1934.  
 #Sugar Glider (*Petaurus breviceps*) – four received and liberated in March 1934.  
 #Tiger Cat (*Dasyurops maculatus*) and unknown number received from David Fleay in February 1941.  
 #Echnida (*Tachyglossus aculeatus*) – several liberated in 1911.  
 #Koala (*Phascolarctos cinereus*) – dates and number not ascertainable but it is presumed that those that were introduced were brought in only to relieve the pressure of over-large populations in other places such as Quail Island.





Landscape after bushfire at the Prom, 1938.  
Photo courtesy Historic Places, Department of Sustainability and Environment, Victoria

## Chapter 10: Indigenous and Exotic Fauna of Wilsons Promontory

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**T**he fauna of the National Park has been studied by a number of people but, excepting the birdlife, with rather less intensity than has the vegetation.

The Promontory is capable of harbouring a very diverse avifauna. Its capacity for doing so is governed by a number of factors, some more apparent than others. For example, a fire can completely destroy a habitat, which may take decades to restore to something resembling its original character. Indeed, it may never recover that character at all. In its place may arise another set of associations to furnish a territory for birds (and other wildlife) very different from that which sheltered the original inhabitants.

A succession of 'good' or 'bad' seasons—by which, generally speaking, is meant periods of unusual rainfall or lack of it, or phenomenally hot summers or cold winters (or vice versa)—can bring about alterations in an environment and cause profound changes in the composition and density of faunal populations.

A road built through a previously trackless area can provide a corridor for easy movement of animals to new territories.

Sunlight, playing on the hitherto shaded soil and vegetation of the roadside, will produce new conditions for the living things there; a kind of new microclimate will be formed and, in response to it, hitherto unnoticed plants may appear and with them new insects and birds, even new bacteria and fungi and all those things embraced by the term 'microflora'.

Changes are taking place continually wherever living things inhabit. Some are exceedingly slow and imperceptible. Others are catastrophic.

In a national park good management is directed towards ensuring that none of the catastrophes are deliberately man-made.

Attempts have been made to record every species of bird seen at one time or another in the National Park but obviously, for several reasons, some of the species in earlier lists will not now be found there.

Years ago the Brolga or Native Companion was quite regularly seen near the Darby River.

Why is it no longer to be seen there or anywhere else on the Promontory?

Were those that were sighted permanent residents, regular visitors or merely explorers seeking good feeding grounds?

Other species have remained loyal to their traditional home and, presumably, will always do so.

The Silver Gulls at Tidal River and their early morning and evening rivals for scraps of food—the Crimson Rosellas—are tame enough to satisfy any photographer although, as one visitor observed, it is much too difficult

to photograph a parrot which persists in alighting on one's head!

A few of the birds recorded years ago have vanished, perhaps never to return. Others, unknown there in the early days are frequently seen there now.

The gregarious Starling was there in 1908 and has never left the region. It is known to roost in great flocks on McHugh Island—the southernmost of the Glennies.

The urban Blackbird has gradually spread throughout the State. It reached the Promontory about 1926. The House Sparrow was unknown in the Park until about the 1940s. It is now common.

Nearly all the birds which attach themselves to man's settled places—the avian camp-followers—have found their way to his habitations on the Promontory, but the native birds seem not to entertain this habit, although many of them profit by his presence and the presence of his domestic animals.

In reading the list of birds one should remember that it can never be complete. New arrivals are continually displacing the old inhabitants. The old inhabitants may even make their own habitats untenable.

A hurricane in the Southern Ocean may bring an Antarctic species to the shore—perhaps as nothing more than an off-course visitor. The record includes several such species but it is questionable whether they should be recognised as a part of the fauna of the Park. The best criterion of that is in the capacity of the place to provide food, a factor which can vary with both the season and the year. For most of the species listed, the food supply is ample and permanent. The species nest and breed in the Park, and therefore, can be regarded as residents.

A number breed on the islands where they enjoy a sanctuary unknown to their mainland kind.

In Corner Basin lies Granite Island, a granite mass of roughly three and a half acres rising seventy or eighty feet above high water mark. It has no trees at all (if we ignore a small sprawling plant of the Coast Wattle seen there in 1959).

The soil is little more than a veneer of sand. It has no beach, little vegetation other than grasses and few other herbaceous plants and yet it is the breeding ground and roosting place of three species of bird—cormorant, silver gull and mutton bird.

The ecology of several of the small islands off the coast of the Promontory has been studied first by members of the McCoy Society and subsequently by organised University researchers, and their reports show that between ten and eleven thousand pairs of mutton birds nest on Granite Island. Something like one hundred pairs of silver gulls nest on the lower southern slopes while about the same number of



Field Naturalists Club party moving camp at Wilsons Promontory, 1905. Photo courtesy Historic Places, Department of Sustainability and Environment, Victoria

Black-faced Cormorants occupy the north-east part of the Island. These species do not depend upon the island's resources for their sustenance. The ocean and the nearby tidal mud-flats provide adequately for their needs.

Bennison Island, 19 acres of granite overlaid with friable grey sand, is another of the Corner Basin islands which has been studied by the various researchers. At low tide it is connected to the mainland Park by mangrove-lined sand and mud-flats.

On its exposed side it possesses shingly beaches and, being rather more sheltered than Granite Island, is clothed with some woody vegetation. On the west side where the shrubs and trees are wind-shorn as well as more scanty than elsewhere, mutton birds have established a colony which, somehow, has managed to survive the repeated onslaughts of foxes, which easily negotiate the mud-flat at low tide. The foxes evidently do not kill for food but just for the sheer joy of it.

Although some sixty species of plant, including the arboreal Coast Banksia, Blackwood, Swamp Paperbark, Coast Beard-heath and Yellow Elderberry, grow on the island, the fauna is sparse, the larger vertebrates being limited to the mutton birds and their frequent associates—Silver Gulls and Black-faced Cormorants. Apart from foxes and these birds, the only animals observed on the island were skink lizards whose forebears were, perhaps, transported there more or less accidentally by birds or on tidal flotsam.

The third Corner Basin island belonging to the National Park is Do Boy [Doughboy], a ten-acre dome of granite which rises sixty feet above sea level and which is entirely surrounded by mud-flats. It lies about two and a half miles to the north of Townsend's Point and it is six miles by water from Port Franklin.

From 1870 to 1878 the island was occupied by a man and his wife. After their departure it was possibly occupied by others, for tradition has it that a hermit lived there. In the best tradition of hermitry he was supposed to be a medical practitioner who had given up his practice in order to concentrate on contemplation in solitude.

The cottage was on the east side of the island by, by 1912, when Professor Ewart and his team of naturalists explored the island, the building was falling into decay.

The period of occupation accounts for the presence of some otherwise unexpected alien plants which still flourish on Do Boy—the Arum Lily, Periwinkle and Cape Wattle. These are but three of the 25 species of alien plant noted there. Various grasses account for ten more.

Altogether a hundred different plants are established on the island which, because of its relatively sheltered situation, is much more densely covered than any other of the Park islands. Its trees include Coast Banksia, Sweet Pittosporum, Black Wattle, Boobialla, White Elderberry, Crimson Berry, Coast Beard-heath, Swamp Paperbark, Tea-tree and Manna Gum. A small group of the gums has remained under observation on the south-west of the summit for at least fifty years.

The island has its bird colonies which include Mutton Birds whose burrows occur in all parts except on the northern slopes. The Large-black Cormorant both roost and nest there.

The only other island included in the National Park which has been carefully studied is the 100-acre Rabbit Island. It lies off the east coast opposite the northernmost part of Five Mile Beach. It, too, is a mass of granite and dune sand rising to 194 feet. The vegetation is scanty and includes a few woody plants

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such as Coast Wattle, White Elderberry, Crimson Berry and White Correa, but it is sufficient to shelter a small population of birds, skink lizards and, for about 140 years, rabbits. Both Mutton Birds and Fairy Penguins breed on the island and during the war years a considerable amount of poaching took place there.

A long narrow sand-blow leading to the summit of its north-east hump serves as a passage for the Mutton Birds to and from their burrows and, since the northern slopes fall away on the west side to a sandy beach, access is easy for poachers and others.

The McCoy Society expedition to Rabbit Island in January 1959 noted the presence of five other species of bird—Black-faced Cormorant, Pacific Gull, Silver Gull, Sooty Oyster-catcher and Brown Hawk.

Rabbit Rock to the south-west of the island and close to the mainland is reported to be the breeding site of both Silver Gull and Sooty Oyster-catchers. Apparently its only vegetation is Pig-face and Tussock Grass.

Most observers have noticed that some introduced non-indigenous species have no difficulty in thriving in their adopted habitat, doubtless because such animals have little to fear from the predators and natural controlling elements which are a part of the environment in the land where they originated. Visitors to Tidal River have ample scope for observing this phenomenon. Despite Myxomatosis and chemical poisons, rabbits remain part of the scenery—browsing on the grassy flats near the cottages and elsewhere from dusk to dawn.

The little Hog Deer is sociable enough to join them soon after sunset and, when calm and quiet has settled over the human population, the wallabies, possums and smaller marsupials emerge to mingle with them.

Wombats are usually in evidence. That animal certainly inhabits the Park where it enjoys an immunity from destruction on sight to which the existing law of the land had condemned it. Wombats are [were – ed] ‘declared vermin’ in Victoria and, except within the sanctuary of a national park, have to be destroyed by any self-respecting citizen who has a conscientious regard for the law.

This is not the most appropriate place to plead the cause of wombat preservation but it might at least be noted that its proscription as a pest is a relic of days long passed when the small farmer in Gippsland just could not afford to repair such rabbit-proof fences as he might have possessed.

The blundering wombat, in his nocturnal sallies, found these fences no obstacle to his movements. He simply barged under them and the rabbit-free paddocks were soon over-run with the rabbits which followed in his wake.

In our time farmers are not so dependent upon fences for rabbit control. Furthermore, in those parts of Gippsland where it is claimed by certain folk that the wombat is a menace to the welfare and prosperity of the farmer, there are, in fact, very few fences but nevertheless, until the system was discontinued in 1965, the bounty of 10/- a scalp accounted for about 7,500 wombats a year.

Naturalists are of the opinion that, if it is good enough for the crop-damaging kangaroo to enjoy an immunity from being shot or otherwise destroyed except under strictly administered licence, then the same measure of protection should be given to the wombat—and equally interesting and far less abundant Australian native marsupial.

Wombats are solitary animals, the population of which is steadily diminishing as settlement extends—as their habitat diminishes. Throughout their long period of sanctuary on Wilsons Promontory they certainly have never developed to pest proportions.

This is a point that might well be noted by those who are ready to say that the wombat must continue to be classed as ‘vermin’ if his numbers are ever likely to be controlled.

There should be two species in the park: the Victorian *Vombatus hirsutus*, and the smaller Tasmanian species *Vombatus ursinus* (or its Bass Strait islands variety) which was introduced almost fifty years ago.

The koala, once so common in a number of localities in the Park, is now rare enough in the frequented areas to excite comment when seen. Its highly selective feeding habits restrict it to places where its preferred food trees flourish, in areas such as Sealers Cover and Barry’s Creek for example. It can be expected that regeneration of the Manna Gum and Blue Gum forests on the eastern side of the Park (a slow enough process) will lead eventually to restoration of the thriving colonies which were formerly known. They inhabit the kind of forest favoured by many other kinds of marsupial and in such environments phalangers and possums have been noted from time to time.

Most of these animals are crepuscular or nocturnal and hence seldom seen by the visitor but the Ring-tail and Grey Brush-tail possums are exceptions for the reason that they have no inhibitions about establishing themselves in and around settled places. The Tea-tree and Banksia groves at Tidal River support a flourishing population of them.

Both species are indigenous to the Park but they were, nevertheless, along with two other species—the Dormouse Possum and the Tasmanian Black Possum—introduced about 1911 by the Committee of Management. The Brush-tail possum was seen on the Ramsay Saddle in 1950 and seems



to have become more abundant since then.

The larger native fauna recorded as existing on the Promontory prior to 1900 included Emu, Dingo, Koala, Black-tailed Wallaby, Wombat, Ring-tail Possum, Brush-tail Possum, Platypus and Echidna—the latter seen on Martin's Hill and now reported as widely distributed. It, too, was among the species liberated there in 1911, as was also the emu and wombat.

Emus have thrived there. The big birds may be seen at any time in the kind of country they favour—the heathy plains and sand dunes. A walk along the Five Mile Beach track between Mount Vereker and Corner Basin can be especially rewarding for here, in this now unfrequented region of the Park, wildlife abounds. A number of introduced species were liberated in this area as well as in the environs of Sealers Cove away to the south-east. The extensive heathy plains, swamps and Banksia forests extend westward to what has been a point of egress from the Park to the Yanakie Isthmus for most of the kangaroos which have descended from those introduced by the Committee years ago. Whether any of them now inhabit the Park to any extent is for future observers to determine but it is said that a colony of the Great Red Kangaroo and numbers of the Black-faced Wallaby are on Singapore Peninsula, in the Mount Hunter area. Both of these species as well as the Scrub Kangaroo and Euro, Red-necked Wallaby, Rufous-bellied Wallaby, Tasmanian Striped Bandicoot and another species of bandicoot were among the early introductions to the Promontory.

In Lilly Pilly Creek and Sealers Creek the Murray River Tortoise was liberated, but as that kind of environment is so different from the normal habitat of this reptile it is improbable that the species would now be found either in those places or anywhere else on the Promontory.

The gullies of such creeks are, however, eminently suitable for animals like the Tuan or Brush-tailed Phascogale—a rather rare native marsupial. It was observed at Sealers Cove in 1926. The Quoll or Eastern Native Cat (*Dasyurus quoll*) is also known to have been an inhabitant of the Park. It was mentioned as having been seen in 1913 since which time there have been occasional reports of its continued existence there.

The National Park is one of the few sanctuaries in the State where this now-rare marsupial's survival can be anticipated.

As stated elsewhere, the once common Dingo has gone. Its place has been taken by the fox and the domestic dog 'gone wild'. Of the two the fox is certainly the greater menace to the ground-dwelling native fauna. It is to be seen occasionally, and heard more often, in the Corner Basin – Mount Vereker sector of the Park where low-growing heath and tea-tree thickets provide good cover for it and where there are bountiful

feeding grounds both in the scrub, on the mud-flats and on the nearby islets of the Basin to which it has access at low tide.

The human visitor, too, can cross to these islets and, at the time of the early biological surveys, much attention was given to the smaller land and marine fauna to be found on or near them. Their lists are not to be taken as comprehensive by any means since they record only the published observations of the few specialists who were able to devote time to the task of collecting and identifying their 'finds'.

Numerous species not included in the lists will have been collected during the intervening years but to the non-entomologist lists of such accessions are not easily located nor readily available. An exception is the check-list kindly furnished by the participants in the Melbourne Church of England Grammar School expedition to Refuge Cove during the 1960–61 summer vacation. This expedition was designed for the purpose of serious scientific study and, as a result of it, much new and useful information on the invertebrate fauna has been obtained.

A very strong reason for the vigorous public opposition to a proposal made in 1960 to withdraw 20,000 acres of the Corner Basin sector of the National Park for the purpose of converting it to farmland lies in the rich and varied flora and fauna which is found there. Possibly no part of the Park has been subjected to such intensive scientific study as has the area in question. Although now not so often visited by tourists it is unquestionably a region of the Park of unique character—an area where can be seen physiographic formations and biological associations quite different from those present in the other sectors.

Its loss would have been a serious blow to the State's program of flora and fauna conservation simply because it is one of the best conservation areas, provided man-made wildfires are kept out of it. Because such threats to the integrity of any one of Victoria's national parks may come again the people should be ready to counter them. Not all that much of the State's 88,760 square miles of territory has been set aside for the purpose of nature protection and scenery preservation to allow any of it to be taken away to satisfy the clamour of this, that or the other sectional interest. Rather should every effort be made now, while what little opportunity there still is remains, to increase the number and size of these reserves. A few decades hence will be too late to attempt to do so if expansion of settlement and State development continue at the present pace. Now is the time we should be acting to extend this great National Park rather than to diminish it.

If conservators can be persuaded to accept the idea of controlled and limited multiple use of certain classes

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of parkland and can persuade the people of the wisdom of doing so there should be little trouble in having the southern end of the Yanakie Isthmus brought within the jurisdiction of the National Parks Authority. The Park needs something to buffer it from the 'controlled' burning-off operations which take place so regularly on Yanakie. The Park's managers need an entrance point where a closer watch can be kept on those who may now come and go much as they please on what is not always lawful business.

And finally, that southern end of the isthmus is a land form of a very distinctive character, possessing biological associations not represented at all within the present boundaries of the Park—associations which are too important scientifically to be subjected to the risk of absolute destruction and loss to the State.

Yanakie provides a first class example of an association of fire-resistant communities. The susceptible species have gone long ago as a result of almost a century of regular burning but what remains now affords a spectacular display, the sight of which is available to visitors who forsake the main road and the comfort of their motor car for a ramble over the heath.

The present [sic] licensed users of this section of the isthmus are agisters, and provided they can have an assurance that their occupation rights will remain they are unlikely to oppose a change of master from the Lands Department which now controls it to the National Parks Authority.

**Preface to Appendix No. 2** [appendices not included – Ed]

The listing of the fauna of the National Park has been much more difficult than that of the flora for the reason that, in the case of plants, more reliable and abundant records have been available.

In comparison with plants, animals are not so readily and reliably identifiable and, excepting the insects and small vertebrates, specimens are rarely collected for permanent reference. The determination of the identity of a species is often a matter of judgement based on expert knowledge of it or familiarity with it. A fleeting glimpse of an unusual animal in the fading light of evening or the dim light of dawn is rarely sufficient to suggest much more than a suspicion about its identity. Continued reports from different sources about the sighting of what is believed to be the same beast would tend to confirm the surmise and, in some instances, an animal's inclusion in the lists of indigenes of the Park has been justified on this basis.

The smaller beasts—insects of all kinds, molluscs, crustaceans etc.—are only recorded in the lists if they have been authoritatively identified and the length (or brevity) of these lists is a fair indication of the degree of enthusiasm with which the various natural orders have

been studied by naturalists and specialists.

Molluscs take pride of place and one might suppose that few kinds of shell have been overlooked by collectors during the period of almost fifty years in which conchologists and malacologists have browsed over the National Park and along its shores. In many instances the living animal which inhabited the shell may not have been seen. The existence of its shell is sufficient evidence that it is an indigene although, even here, one must exercise some caution. Ocean currents and tides wash up all sorts of objects onto the beach. Such objects are not necessarily local in origin. They may come from passing ships or they may be dropped by birds and, to the expert, only the circumstances of the 'find' will indicate whether or not it may be claimed as a normal inhabitant of the region in which it is found.

Next in popularity come the coleoptera or beetles of which an almost infinite variety exists. Doubtless the present list could be doubled or trebled by concentrated or systematic collecting or observations. They are easy to collect, require little equipment for collection and occupy little space for transport to home, laboratory or museum where they can be studied and identified at leisure. Despite the long years of patient collecting and classifying to which they have been subjected all too little is known of the detailed life history of most of them. There is wide-open field for study by entomologists—professional and amateur alike—and the National Park is a place where studies of that kind may be most rewarding. There prevail conditions favouring continuance of the kind of natural environment which is diminishing fast in Victoria's settled places.

The Lepidoptera or moths and butterflies, too, have long engaged the attention of enthusiasts and specialists, partly because the imago—the 'adult' insect—looks so attractive when expertly arranged in a classified collection. Those which are known to occur or to have occurred in the National Park are mostly well enough known elsewhere. An important restriction on the distribution of a species lies in the availability or otherwise of the plant on which the larvae of the insect feed. In a number of instances the food plant is known and, from observation, has emerged the curious fact that some species, at least, are quite selective and discriminating. Their larvae feed on one particular species of plant or, perhaps, on species of plant belonging to only one genus, hence the presence of a particular moth or butterfly is a certain indication that a particular species of plant or a species of a particular genus of plants is not far away. As well as their larvae, some moths and butterflies also feed and they too have special preferences for certain blossoms. The lepidopterist, knowing this, knows also the likely hunting grounds.

The wide variety of plants occurring in the National Park, as well as the impressive diversity of its ecological associations, makes the Promontory one of the outstanding stations for biological and zoological investigations—a fact which has long been recognised by scientists. The establishment in November 1961 of the McLennan Biological Research Station at Tidal River is something which has been envisaged for many years, and now that its facilities are available to those engaging in serious biological investigation and research one may expect that it will not be long before the sparse records now quoted in these check-lists of fauna will begin to grow and much more will be learned of the fauna of the Park.

It is almost absurd to list the now-recorded species within many of the natural orders—the numbers are so few. Undoubtedly hundreds of species not now listed are well known inhabitants. Most of those insects which dwell with us, wherever we may be, are probably to be found in the Park. Hosts of other and less familiar kinds are sure to be there but who can give them a name? Some may have no name, having never been described in scientific literature. Others, perhaps, are blessed with several names. They have been described as many times by different people and a difficulty is to determine which name should prevail.

As with plants, the name of any animal listed is that now recognised by specialists. The director and officers of the National Museum in Melbourne have very kindly—and, be it said, at no small trouble—checked the lists in an effort to ensure that recognised synonyms and invalid names have been avoided and that obvious errors of determination and nomenclature have been corrected. They have also supplemented the entries in the several lists from sources known to them.

It is quite odd to note that no one seems to have given much attention to the native bees, spiders, mites, ticks, gall and scale insects and creatures of such kind which manifest themselves quite obviously. It is safe to say that a hundred different spiders could be found in the Park yet the published records mention only one named species!

Again, only the common Scrub Tick has been listed yet several species, each sort parasitic on the animal of its choice, are there. So it is with animal lice and fleas and very many more of those insects which everybody vaguely recognise by few bother to identify precisely.

There was some doubt in the mind of the compiler of these check-lists whether a list of the pelagic fauna would be of any value at all. Most of the larger species are mobile enough to be at home in any part of thousands of square miles of ocean. The marine fauna off Wilsons Promontory would not differ remarkably from that found elsewhere in southern waters hence

one would be almost justified in assuming that any fish or other marine animal found in the Southern Ocean or in Bass Strait could be caught off Wilsons Promontory. A complete list would be rather like a catalogue of the marine fauna of south-eastern Australia.

The intertidal, estuarine and fresh-water species are of much more interest inasmuch as they are components of communities having a relatively restricted habitat. Their present distribution is bound up with the ancient history of the Promontory, its geological history and the succession of physiographic changes that has taken place during the passing centuries.

Birds present a rather special case. Bird observing is a very serious occupation of many folk and the conscientious bird observer and ornithologist will not accept lightly an unsupported species determination. All the birds enumerated in the check-list have been seen on the Promontory at one time or another. Some of the records may seem rather dubious because they refer to species no longer present. However, as explained elsewhere, this is only to be expected because of changes in the environment.

The bird observers of the early days were apt to be no less cautious than their present day counterparts although their approach to the question of verification may have differed somewhat. In order to overcome possible objections to the unsupported evidence of a lone observer the bird was, if necessary, shot and its skin kept as a tangible proof of its identity. Few reputable bird observers do that now. The more patient ones do their 'shooting' with a camera, while others rely on the supporting evidence of a companion. Now, instead of earning compliments on their marksmanship they derive considerable satisfaction from displaying their skill as photographers and winning acclaim for the artistry and exactitude of their bird photographs. A well-exposed and carefully focused colour transparency of a Ground Parrot on its nest or feeding its young in Wilsons Promontory National Park would be certain to entrance any bird enthusiast.

Now that the English blackbird has established itself in the Park any talk of the sighting of a Spangled Drongo is received very cautiously. The two birds are superficially alike although not even distantly related. They illustrate, in a minor way, what biologists term 'evolutionary convergence'—a phenomenon by which two animals (or plants) of vastly different ancestry, have evolved, in places far removed from one another and often in opposite sides of the globe, to forms which resemble one another. The Promontory, with its wealth of birds, has a lot to offer bird observers and their cameras.

## Chapter 11: Post-war History of the Prom – 1946 to 1963

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Our survey of the history of Wilsons Promontory National Park has brought us rather deviously to recent times and there is little left to tell that is not well known to the visitor of today.

The alleged aftermath of the military occupation aroused considerable and quite widespread concern. Once more the Field Naturalists Club took the initiative and set up a committee to examine and report upon conditions as they were found to exist in the National Park after the departure of the army. The enquiry showed that a considerable amount of 'rehabilitation' would have to be undertaken if the Promontory were to fulfil its function as a National Park and Nature conservation reserve.

The committee did not confine its attention to Wilsons Promontory. It made specific recommendations about each of the existing National Parks in Victoria and a general recommendation that the Government create a controlling authority for them all—an authority which would be endowed with sufficient funds to carry out the maintenance and developmental work so obviously needed. The committee's report was published in June 1946 and it received the wholehearted support of the public and the press.

It was adopted by a conference of delegates from all of the metropolitan organisations known to have any interest in or concern for the State's National Parks, and it formed the basis of the long campaign which led to the creation of the National Parks Authority in 1956.

An interesting sidelight on the events of those times, insofar as they affected Victorian national parks, was the obvious concern for them shown by the public. The leading articles in the newspapers, public statements and press correspondence were numerous and frequent enough to show that national parks were important in its estimation. The enthusiasm of those who took part in the several conferences, public discussions and deputations during the years 1947 to 1952 brought about the formation of a new National Parks Association in 1952. It was born as a formal association of all the organisations which had been engaged in the campaign for a better deal for Victoria's national parks and it very quickly won the support of the general public. Today, the Association is recognised as a healthy link between the public and those official bodies concerned in the maintenance and management of Victoria's national parks. Its present State-wide membership includes every important organisation interested in Nature protection and, at the present time [1963], it has the support of about 1500 individual members all eager to do something for the betterment and preservation of the wonderful heritage which is Victoria's scenery and its native wildlife.

The Committee of Management of Wilsons

Promontory National Park was no less concerned than others about the post-war condition of its charge and, in the summer of 1950, at its request a team of scientists undertook a biological survey of the Park. The party included the late Dr R.T. Patton of the Melbourne University Botany School, three members of the staff of the National Museum—Mr C.W. Brazenor (mammalogist), Mr W.J. Hitchcock (ornithologist) and Miss H. Macpherson (marine biologist)—and Mr D.A. Casey, an ethnologist.

Their report was not especially comforting to the Committee but the recommendations contained in it may well have helped to establish the pattern of its future policy—as to what was needed and how it should be achieved.

In the succeeding years the Committee gave some attention to the task of restoring the Park to something of its old glory and the people of Victoria have reason to be grateful to it for the earnestness with which it undertook the job. Its members tackled it without much in the way of tangible reward and, perhaps, little acknowledgment but, happily, their successors now have the understanding support of a number of Government Departments which cooperate with the National Parks Service.

The re-opening of the Park to campers must have awakened some nostalgic memories in many of the visitors. Those who had not seen the place for a decade or so would have been depressed by the scene of desolation in their old haunts at the Darby River and by the changed face of the one-time quiet camping ground at Tidal River.

An older and more seasoned John Sparkes was there to greet them but the former atmosphere of peace and tranquillity had departed. At Tidal River buildings were being demolished or re-modelled and new ones were arising among the remains of the groves of banksia and tea-tree. A village settlement was evolving. The old chalet, ranger's cottage, rest hut and other buildings at the Darby were abandoned and eventually pulled down. Sparkes was installed in a new house at Tidal River.

In November 1947, A.J. Watson was appointed to assist the ranger and, together, the two men started the long job of restoring old tracks, cutting new ones and, in between times, supervising the development of the new village.

The temporary affluence of the Committee, brought about by the Commonwealth's compensation payments, allowed new works to proceed apace.

In December 1947 the Assistant Ranger took charge of the Post Office and the Committee's general store. This latter innovation endured for several years—until business became too large to be carried on as a spare-time occupation. Eventually it was transferred to the





Early lodges at Tidal River, c. 1953.

Photo courtesy Historic Places, Department of Sustainability and Environment, Victoria

care of a lessee. The summer holidays of 1947–48 brought nearly 300 visitors to the Park, and to them the store was a boon.

Watson resigned in July 1949 and his place was taken by Percy Gilbert, who remained until May 1951.

Sparkes and Gilbert were there to witness the beginning of a new era in tourist development at the National Park—the opening in September 1949 of several furnished lodges for hire to visitors. These lodges proved so popular that the Committee lost little time in bringing more into commission.

‘Waratah’, ‘Oberon’ and ‘Titania’ were in great demand. ‘Waratah’ had a sleeping cubicle with three beds, a living room with two beds, a kitchen equipped with a fire stove, a sink with cold water laid on, built-in cupboards and a car port. ‘Oberon’ and ‘Titania’ were described as ‘double units’—two self-contained lodges under one roof, each having two bedrooms with five beds and a combined living room-kitchen with fire stove and open fireplace.

‘Glennie’, ‘Rodondo’ and ‘Shellback’ were ‘triple units’—three lodges under a single roof. Together they accommodated twelve people.

By the summer season of 1953 there were seventeen lodges which, between them, provided beds for sixty or seventy people. The additions were ‘Lilly Pilly’,

Kershaw’, ‘Latrobe’, Vereker’, ‘Mattingley’ and a terrace of two-bunk cabins bearing the distinguishing names of a few of the birds of the National Park—‘Gannet’, ‘Lorikeet’, ‘Blue Wren’, ‘Grebe’ and ‘Gull’. ‘Mattingley’ was reserved for official use—the Committee’s cottage.

It was the ranger’s job to see that the lodges and cabins were properly equipped to receive tenants.

Other services and amenities were gradually introduced. Toilet blocks and dressing sheds with hot and cold water were provided and electric power soon became available. There were five campers’ kitchens for hire and, as well, a barbecue, an open arena for motion pictures at night and a campers’ lounge with a large open fireplace to lend an air of homely comfort during the winter. A couple of ping-pong tables were installed for those who could find no other convenient way of dissipating their energy.

In the years since it was first opened to the public the ‘village’ has grown beyond recognition. Nearly every service that one could expect is there – a cafe, post office, a bank agency, petrol stations, ice store, children’s playground, workshops, office buildings, open-air fireplaces, barbecues, and a general store where newspapers, fresh meat and milk and almost anything else can be obtained.

During the ‘seasons’ both store and cafe are



Tidal River valley, showing effects of 1951 bushfire.

Photo courtesy Historic Places, Department of Sustainability and Environment, Victoria

thronged with enough customers to turn the average suburban shopkeeper green with envy. Between them, for a few weeks in the year, they can expect the regular custom of two or three thousand patrons a day! By comparison, Mrs Weston at the Darby Chalet, with her 40 guests and about as many campers, lived in solitude.

None of the buildings was remarkable for its architectural grace and none seems to have been designed to blend with the landscape, but that was not altogether the fault of the Committee. They made the best use they could of the material and layout of the former military establishment.

In the summer of 1949–50 a relatively small bushfire caused the Committee to consider measures for fire prevention and control and the outcome was an instruction to the rangers to press on with their track-clearing program.

Naturally, cattle grazing had been resumed 'to reduce the fire hazard' and, just incidentally, to furnish about £200 a year revenue to the Committee.

All this activity at Tidal River made the place look rather like a shambles. The ground cover had been largely destroyed to make room for tracks, car parks, camp sites and buildings. The river flats which, once upon a time, had been so densely covered with Tea-

tree, Paperbark and Banksia were now almost bare sand so the Committee decided upon a replanting program. Accordingly, small areas were replanted with native shrubs and the verges of the main road through the built-up section of the 'village' and the side-tracks were planted with kikuyu grass. Today the results of this operation are there for all to see—especially the kikuyu!

Camps and caravans take a heavy toll of vegetation and, as room has been made for 1000 camp sites at Tidal River, it will be easily understood that replanting tends to be a continuing operation.

Assistant Ranger Gilbert resigned in May 1951, and his place was taken by R. Bell. Mrs Bell became the Committee's storekeeper and she ran the business for the ensuing three years.

1951 is a year that will be long remembered by those who frequent the Promontory. In February of that year some fires on Yanakie were calmly allowed to burn for almost three weeks. In the words of one observer 'the fires were not serious'.

In due course one of them moved towards the Southwest Corner and, helped by a rising wind, burned through to the east, destroying most of the vegetation and wildlife in the parishes of Beek Beek and Warreen. It then spread to the south and moved swiftly into the





Mustering cattle on the beach at Darby River, c.1950.

Photo courtesy Historic Places, Department of Sustainability and Environment, Victoria

parishes of Kulk and Tallang and was halted only by the ocean. There were fears for the safety of the Lighthouse staff but by dint of tremendous effort the famous old edifice was left unscathed, although the fire caused £40,000 worth of damage to the Commonwealth's installations on the Lighthouse reserve.

The damage to the National Park could not be assessed in terms of pounds, shillings and pence. At least 75,000 acres—almost three fourths of the entire Park—had been thoroughly burned. As might well be imagined, the loss of animal life was colossal.

Ranger Sparkes discounted the danger to the Tidal River settlement and to the throng of tourists there because he had burned fire-breaks around the camp in the previous year. But breaks or no breaks, if the wind had favoured the advance of the fire in the direction of the village, those there would have known all about it.

On a still day a cartwheel track is a wide enough fire break in sand country, but if a thirty or forty mile an hour hot and searing wind is blowing, five hundred yards of sand will not stop the advance of a bushfire. The glowing ash and cinders, kept alive by rushing air and pockets of explosive gases, can readily leap such a gap and, wherever they happen to land, ignite tinder-dry material. Despite the ranger's faith in his fire-breaks it was a miracle that the Tidal River village remained untouched by the fire that raged around it.

In some States of the U.S.A. the public is rigidly excluded from certain State forests and Parks during the summer season when high fire danger prevails. Certain of the National Parks are simply closed down for the season.

It was a serious mistake to have permitted the growth of the holiday resort at Tidal River. The thousands who gather there in mid-summer are bottled up. Their only escape route, when threatened by catastrophe, is the seven mile flammable bush-lined road by which they entered the Park. The sea is a poor protection as the camper found out when he was trapped by fire at Tidal River in 1937—an incident referred to elsewhere.

From many points of view the northern approach to the Park in the vicinity of Darby River is a far better place for a tourist centre than Tidal River.

It will be said that innumerable communities have grown up amidst dense forest and scrub. The residents of such places have taken the risk—which is small enough anyhow—but it is worth noting that practically all such settlements have at least one through road and more than one escape route. Those which were at the dead end of a road have long since gone up in smoke and, in any event, have not as a rule contained large and concentrated populations.

Some used the fire catastrophe as an argument in favour of extending the road to the Lighthouse, but such a road would be of little use to people trapped at Tidal River. It would only lead them to the precipitous granite cliffs overlooking the ocean at South East Point—further than ever from succour.

Wherever else the present village might have been established, the other problems peculiar to popular tourist resorts would have arisen just as surely as they have arisen at Tidal River. The phenomenal growth of

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the village is a reflection of the people's yearning for outdoor recreation in a place where they do not have to forego altogether the amenities of suburban life, in a place which still retains some of the qualities of wild bushland. So long as the day-to-day population of the Park is limited to about 5000 people and so long as 4500 of them remain within a radius of half a mile of the centre of the village not much more than one and a half square miles of the Park need be 'written off' as a sanctuary. If the radius is extended to one mile, more than twice that area of sanctuary will be lost. Extend it even more to two miles and over twelve square miles is forfeited.

This kind of arithmetic leaves one with the realisation that, expansive as Wilsons Promontory National Park may appear to be on the map, a network of roads and tracks and the expansion of the settled area to the foot of Bishop's Rock, two miles from Tidal River village, should be contemplated with apprehension.

We should not make the mistake of believing that because palatial accommodation is provided for visitors to, say, Banff National Park in the Canadian Rockies it should be done at Wilsons Promontory in Victoria. Banff is remote from settled places and is 2,564 square miles in extent. The Promontory is close to sizeable towns and is 160 square miles. Canadians can spare a small fraction of their huge National Parks for that purpose. Of the eighteen National Parks in their Dominion five of them exceed one thousand square miles and thirteen of them exceed one hundred square miles.

Naturally, a population of the size which now throngs Tidal River every summer and autumn imposes a severe strain on the sanitary resources of the place. A normal number of visitors is of the order of 5,000, most of them concentrated into an area of about one hundred acres.

The population of Greater Melbourne is less than five per acre: Tidal River, with its fifty per acre, might well provide an interesting and informative study for planners and engineers of the Melbourne and Metropolitan Board of Works.

The provision of further accommodation within the Park at Tidal River and its environs is not going to solve any problems. Rather it will accentuate those that already exist.

In June 1954 the National Parks Association arranged an excursion to the Park under the leadership of the present writer. By this time the village had taken on the appearance of orderliness and, it being the tourists' 'off season', the place was serene and uncrowded.

The effects of the big fire of February 1951 were obscured by an abundant regrowth of vegetation but birds and other animals were still scarce.

Several walks were arranged under the leadership of naturalists such as Philip Crosbie Morrison, Charles Bryant, Bill Burston and others. In the evenings talks were given in the Campers' Lounge. Burston spoke on the geology of the Park. Bryant dealt with its birdlife and Garnet described its flora and, with the aid of a large series of black and white slides, gathered together by the first secretary to the Committee of Management—J.A. Kershaw—he and Dick Hemmy outlined the early history of the National Park. The interest evinced in these evening talks gave a fair indication of the kind of reception such talks might be expected to receive were they to be given regularly to those who visit the Park. It is a practice now adopted by our National Parks Service but in other places an attractive feature of a visit to a National Park is the opportunity it affords for learning about its natural history from competent Park naturalists and for joining in a nature trail excursion under the guidance of one who can draw attention to the one and a hundred interesting things which, without such a leader, one would be likely to overlook. It is an interpretive phase of national park management which has been found to be of increasing importance in other lands.

In May 1954 Assistant Ranger Bell resigned and F.K. Blunden took his place and occupied the position for a couple of years. He subsequently took over the lease of the general store.

In June 1955 the Museum, first installed in the Campers' Lounge by the National Museum trustees in 1953, was transferred to an annex at the rear of the building.

The exhibits displayed but a small fraction of the plants and animals which may be seen in the Park but the specimens were enough, perhaps, to awaken an interest in its wildlife. If the museum does no more than that it will have justified itself and confirmed the belief of its staunch advocate—the late Crosbie Morrison—that it should be recognised as an essential institution in any nature conservation reserve. Small as it is it never fails to attract attention from almost every visitor who has a moment to spare.

By 1955 a decade had passed since the end of the Second World War and the National Park seemed to have settled down pleasantly enough to peace time conditions.

Influenced by the disaster of February 1951 as much as by some pressure from the National Parks Association and its component organisations, the Government of the day drafted a Bill to authorise the creation of an authority to control all Victorian national parks. Fortunately, that particular Government did not last long enough for the Bill to reach the Statute Book. The succeeding Government devised a somewhat better



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Bill but it got no further than the draft stage before its sponsors were succeeded by another administration. Its National Parks Bill, as first drafted, was recognised as an acceptable measure by the Association but less informed interests caused it to be considerably altered during its passage through Parliament.

While this Bill to protect and preserve Victoria's National Parks was being debated in Parliament the Commonwealth Minister of Defence, Mr Francis, announced that he was considering a proposal by the army that Wilsons Promontory National Park be used as a peace-time training ground for commandos.

The public had not forgotten what had happened to the place when the war-time commandos were in occupation and Mr Francis was soon made aware that the people of Victoria would be better pleased if the army looked elsewhere for a training centre.

It was fortunate for the future welfare of the Park that the Commonwealth Minister chose that particular year to make his announcement—at a time when the public was taking a more than usual interest in its national parks.

The Park was saved from the commandos, but its traditional *bête noir*—cattle grazing—was still being inflicted upon it. As will be inferred from the account in the chapter on the pastoral Runs, the fortunes (and misfortunes) of the National Park have been almost inextricably bound up with Yanakie and the grazing interests. In fact, in the minds of many, the sandy dunes, hummocks and plains of the Yanakie Isthmus are as much a part of Wilsons Promontory as the granite mountains to the south of Corner Basin.

As a consequence of the preparations for settling the northern end of the isthmus, the Lands Department announced that in future no more than 2,000 head of cattle would be permitted on the Common—a further limitation which brought a spirited protest from the agisters and from the Council of the Shire of South Gippsland, but the restriction remained.

It was of little advantage to the Committee of Management of the Park. The 1951 fire had destroyed what was left of the boundary fence between the Common and the Park. There was nothing to stop the cattle roaming over the Park and mingling with those which were legally entitled to be there. The Park rangers had enough to do at Tidal River without having to spend time cutting out trespassing cattle. The agisters of the Yanakie Common reaped a small benefit as a consequence.

The long-awaited National Parks Act was passed in 1956 and, in the following year, proclaimed.

Crosbie Morrison was appointed Director of National Parks and, as mentioned elsewhere, he withdrew from

the Committee of Management of Wilsons Promontory National Park.

In October of the previous year the veteran ranger, John Sparkes, retired in ill health after almost seventeen years of continuous service. He had been the Park's senior ranger for more than fourteen of them. He was succeeded by R.C. Turner who took up duty in November 1956 and continued as Ranger until 1964 when he, too, retired on account of ill health.

During the past ten years several Assistant Rangers had come and gone. Blunden resigned in July 1956. A. Bentley was his successor and he remained until May 1959 when his place was taken by C. Crawford.

In September 1962 Crawford departed and R. James filled the position for a little over fourteen months. In October 1961 an additional assistant Ranger, R.S. Turner, was appointed but he ceased duty after a short stay of seven months.

In the following years, in accordance with what appears to have been the general policy of the National Parks Act, Assistant Rangers seem to have disappeared from the staff, their place being taken by men of other classifications with designations which are intended to be more descriptive of the kind of work allotted them.

Whatever happens on Yanakie is likely to be soon reflected by happenings on the Promontory.

The southern portion of the isthmus—the Parish of Yanakie South—has passed through several phases in the past one hundred years; pastoral runs in the 1860s, subdivision into grazing blocks thirty years later and, thirty years after that, resumption as Common land. Before it reaches its final phase, as part of the National Park, what else is left for it to experience? Some of it could be converted to farms (at a price) but the few farms that could be developed make it a hardly worthwhile proposition.

In 1958 the Committee of Management was persuaded to seek its inclusion in the National Park but the proposal was resisted by the Yanakie Agisters' Association whose members claimed that their very livelihood depended upon the continued existence of the Common and upon their right to use it. Feeling ran high about the proposal and accordingly it was shelved for the time being. At one of the several public meetings which were held in the district a one-time assistant ranger, who had spent over eighteen months on the Promontory, announced that he could not see why the National Park should be extended. 'It was quite big enough as it was.'

Since he doubtless saw the Park only as a tourist resort and nothing else he could not be blamed for voicing an opinion which is held by many who know even less about the place as a nature conservation reserve. If

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he was in fact thinking of it as a nature reserve then, as an ex-ranger, he was curiously ill-informed.

Further difficulties were placed in the way of those who were urging the annexation of the Common.

Several individuals took out mining leases for the purpose of quarrying limestone.

It will be understood from what has been said in the chapter on geology and physiography of the Promontory that the isthmus is largely sand dune country, much of the sand being of marine origin and, therefore, carrying substantial deposits of limestone. Most of the limestone lies close to the surface, and in places is actually exposed. Despite this fact, 'experts' have complained loudly about the difficulties of using this part of the country for productive farming because of the lime deficient character of the soil! If they could only get agricultural lime at cheaper rates their problems would be solved.

Well, when this 'useless, lime-deficient' area of the isthmus was suggested as suitable for national park purposes the opponents of the proposal forgot about their earlier judgment and blandly set to work to develop an agricultural lime industry. It meant nothing to them that the quality of the rock was mediocre from an agricultural point of view, or that crushing and distribution costs precluded it from being a profitable industry.

Had the Yanakie limestone deposits been as good as the promoters claimed they would have been exploited half a century ago. The better quality deposits on Waratah Bay and the lime kilns at Walkerville did not make fortunes for their operators.

The episode of the Yanakie limestone quarries was reminiscent of the tin-mining venture on Mount Hunter and the Forest Department's 'Arboretum' at Barry's Creek.

The problem of getting a payable local market for the 60–70% carbonate limestone on Yanakie did not weigh very heavily on the minds of the sponsors. After all, the economics of it mattered little. The real purpose was to remove the threat of Yanakie South being incorporated into the National Park.

While this dreadful fate was being resisted in some local quarters, another scheme which was intended to have a much more serious effect on the National Park was being quietly formulated. Yanakie Common, under the best of circumstances, would provide too few farm blocks to make settlement worthwhile but, if some of the National Park could be seized, this slight impediment to progress and development might be overcome.

By July 1960 the next step was revealed—not very loudly and without any fanfare.

The Soldiers' Settlement Commission wanted 20,000 acres of the Promontory. Provided it could get 6,600 acres of the National Park—a portion of the heathlands in the vicinity of Chinaman's Bay and another little bit at Barry's Creek—it would be enabled to accommodate from 80 to 100 new settlers on just the kind of farm that had been created on the northern plains of Yanakie.

It was not Skye crofters this time but the more appealing 'returned soldier' who, it seems, had been rather neglected during the fifteen or sixteen years which had passed since his repatriation or demobilisation.

The scheme would have meant the revocation of just this area of permanently dedicated reserve. It aroused so much hostility throughout the State that the Government, with proper deference to public opinion, vetoed it.

The Commission's proposition shocked the agisters too. They could see their hold on the Common becoming more and more insecure. It took some time for local opinion to crystallise but when it became apparent that the advantage in having the use of the Common (which, they claimed, was worth £20,000 a year to them) was about to evaporate and be replaced by a speculative advantage to eighty or so selected landholders, they decided to back the opinion of the rest of the State and oppose the settlement scheme. They have reconciled themselves to the idea of the Common becoming part of the National Park provided they are permitted to continue grazing their cattle on it.

The reason given to justify the alteration of the status of National Parks—and other nature reserves—are many, various and mostly unsound and unconvincing.

'They are too big to manage properly'.

The *reductio ad absurdum* is to have none at all. The problem of management would not then arise. Anyhow, other countries—notably Canada and New Zealand—seem to have no great difficulty in managing National Parks far larger than any Victoria happens to possess. The 17,000 square mile Wood National Park and the 2,564 square mile Banff National Park, both in Alberta, do not appear to suffer unduly as a consequence of their generous size!

'Fire protection in a large Park is too difficult and costly.'

Call it what you like—National Park, State Forest, unoccupied Crown land, farm or settlement—the area concerned would be just the same and, therefore, the difficulty and costliness of effective fire prevention and fire protection measures would be just the same unless, of course, the land is valued according to the name given it, rather than to the purpose it serves or who happens to hold the title to it.

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‘Much of the area is of no scenic interest, scarcely known to the public, is just useless scrub, has too great a potential to be withheld from farming, cattle grazing, timber logging, mining, quarrying and a thousand other forms of exploitation which can put money into the pocket of someone or other.’

So what? The same kind of reasoning could apply to any open space. Even a hole in the ground is worth money to someone.

The components of biological communities which National Parks are intended to conserve are wedded to their associates, not to what we think of as scenery. For their protection it is just as well public access remains, by force of circumstance, restricted.

It would be a poor sort of National Park were it to contain nothing at all of commercial value. If the complete absence of anything convertible to currency were to be the criterion of availability of land for the purposes of a National Park we would be hard put to it to find a suitable site for one. Even if we thought that such a site had been discovered someone would be sure to find that it contained some tangible resource worth exploiting.

No. The community has come to recognise that the size of a National Park must be such as can give optimum protection to its inhabiting wildlife communities. It is this very requirement that can give cause for worry to a conscientious Service or a Committee of Management.

At the end of 1960 the Premier announced that his Cabinet had rejected the Settlement Commission’s scheme ‘*on principle and not for any other reason*’ (which might have been interpreted as another way of saying that he was not especially overawed by public opinion).

The three metropolitan newspapers carried leading articles to commemorate the Premier’s announcement.

*The Age* concluded its comments with the thought:

‘The Wilsons Promontory episode is a forceful example of the necessity for constant vigilance in defence of all our reserves and a reminder that their preservation rests primarily in the hands of the community.

If we want to keep our parklands we must be ever-ready to rap the greedy hands which reach out for them.’

*The Sun* headed its leader:

‘Let this be a warning’ and concluded: ‘Anyone who gets ‘ideas’ about our parklands should remember the tone of the Premier’s statement—on principle.’ while *The Herald* observed that ‘The flurry paid off.’

(Mr Bolte, the Premier, had complained that everyone had got in a flurry over the business even before his Cabinet had had an opportunity of considering it.) But, as *The Herald* remarked:

‘Experience over a long time has shown that ‘flurries’ of public opinion over parkland are most often justified. They are an expression of the people’s feeling that excuses for nibbling a section here and a section there must not override a principle of preserving our public reserves.’

These worthy sentiments appear to have made less impact in political circles than might have been reasonably anticipated. How much of the Promontory reserve is to be kept intact, subject to a minimum of human interference?

How many people can it accommodate at any one time without irreversibly disturbing the biological balance of the many types of community within it?

Sometimes an answer to such questions can be drawn from the recollection of past experience, sometimes by observation of events yet to come.

How will the Park react to a periodical and frequent invasion by even 60,000 visitors, their 120,000 feet and their 20,000 vehicles? How kindly will the wildlife communities respond to a maze of motor roads penetrating to remote corners of the sanctuary? What will be the effect of the several firebreaks which modern fire prevention and control techniques appear to find essential?

Questions of this kind are mentioned to introduce another matter which aroused intense public interest in 1961.

Hardly had the soldier settlement controversy closed than a new one began. In February 1961 the then Minister of State Development and Chairman of the National Parks Authority, the Hon. A.J. Fraser MLA, announced that the Government had approved a plan which would involve the alienation for 75 years of fifty acres of this same National Park.

A group of prominent (but unnamed) businessmen, backed by overseas capital, were to be given facilities to invest £1,000,000 in a hotel at Pillar Point near Tidal River. The first stage of the project would cost £200,000.

The establishment would accommodate 600 guests and there would be separate quarters for a permanent staff of 200 and hotel executives. There would be a large hall to cater for conventions, conference rooms and a cinema, a chapel, a Royal suite for special guests, a main dining room to seat the 600 guests, a special dining room for vegetarians, indoor swimming pool and cafeteria, a day nursery for children, squash courts, table tennis facilities, indoor bowling alley, gymnasium and library. Mr Fraser

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expected the hotel to be operating by the following summer.

An amendment of the 1956 National Parks Act, passed in 1960, gave the National Parks Authority power to grant a lease of part of any National Park for a period up to 75 years provided the lessee agreed to erect a building thereon 'the cost of which must not be less than £100,000.'

The promptitude with which the Minister's announcement followed the passage of the amendment to the Act more than suggests the thought that the amendment was pushed through Parliament at the behest of the unnamed prominent businessmen with their backing of overseas capital.

There was another amendment which looked after the interests of the smaller local investor. It gave the National Parks Authority power to grant concessions to any person or body or persons to occupy any portion of a National Park for a period not exceeding 33 years. This amendment made no demands on the lessee to spend any money on expensive buildings. It was, in fact, intended to validate existing leases which had been held before the Act was passed. Under the terms of this amendment the store and cafeteria at Tidal River became legal enterprises. Their existence had been overlooked when the original Act was framed. As for the 'million pound hotel', if any scheme for 'developing' Wilsons Promontory National Park aroused public resentment this 75-year lease project did.

The reaction was prompt, vigorous and almost uniformly unfavourable. Obviously Victorians were not lacking in vigilance, but the kind of flurry which paid off in 1960 appeared to be ineffective in 1961.

The circumstances were somewhat different.

In 1960 Cabinet had to make its decision in the face of adverse public opinion. In 1961 Cabinet made its decision first. Public opinion was able to achieve little more than cause a modification of the ridiculously grandiose scheme. It was unable to re-establish Cabinet's 1960 espousal of a principle.

Most of those who had something to say about the hotel project commended the proposition that suitable accommodation should be provided for the more comfort-loving visitor. Most of them, drinkers and non-drinkers alike, objected to a licensed hotel, mostly on aesthetic grounds. Few wanted the establishment at Pillar Point because they felt that, if built there, just so much more of their Park would be out of bounds to them or to those who preferred to take their recreation the harder way by camping or caravanning.

Others were worried about the sanitation problems which might be expected to arise were a 600-guest hotel to be put anywhere near the Tidal River camp site.

The 'village' already had a serious enough problem on that account.

Some showed praiseworthy concern for the welfare of the promoters who, they considered, could hardly anticipate worthwhile dividends from an investment of such a huge sum on a venture of this sort at a place where the 'season' was limited to two recognised holiday periods of the year—Christmas and Easter. They reckoned that eventually the taxpayer would be called upon to make good the inevitable losses. That being the case he might as well finance the thing from the beginning and continue to maintain steadfastly his share of the ownership of public property. Interest in the scheme remained alive for months without anyone having said the last word. Even in 1964 the Government was being reminded about the principle.

By this time the area to be alienated had been reduced to ten acres and the site changed to 'Bishop's Rock'.

The expensive frills had disappeared from the drawing boards and the hotel (or motel—it was never certain which) had dwindled to a size sufficient to accommodate 100 guests.

The rich overseas investors remained anonymous and their place was taken by a single entrepreneur—a Dutch businessman who, for some years, had conducted a children's playground and nursery in a Melbourne suburb, a Mr Ungar, who claimed no relationship to Andy, the one-time proprietor of the pub at Fish Creek.

In the end, the frustrated public were left with little more to say than had not been already said—and ignored. In fact, so many 'red herrings' had been dragged across the trail that apart from savouring the oppressive odour, many were left with the impression that the controversy devolved on the question whether or not the establishment should be granted a liquor license—which had little to do with the general principle of maintaining Wilsons Promontory National Park as a nature reserve not as a tourist resort.

The National Parks Association expressed the majority view of nature conservationists when it stated that if good-class accommodation was to be provided for visitors to the Park, the building should not occupy any of the prominent or popular scenic places so as to exclude the greater number of visitors from such places. It should for preference be situated outside the boundaries of the Park and, if necessary, near the entrance where water supply would present no serious problem and where sanitation arrangements could be undertaken satisfactorily and without detriment to the welfare of the thousands who frequented the Park. The Association was opposed to the leasing of any portion at the entire Park to private enterprise. It took the view that, if a financial benefit were derivable from visitors



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through providing them with amenities, those benefits should be retained by the Park authorities and applied in maintaining existing facilities or, if need be, extending them.

In September 1961, during a quiet interlude in this controversy, about two square miles of the Park between the Darby and Tidal River were burned.

In that same month, through the joint efforts of the Committee of Management, the National Parks Authority and the Tourist Development Authority, the construction of seven terrace apartments, to cost £13,000, was begun. The flats, designed to accommodate families, were completed early in the following year.

Some of the comfort-loving public were being catered for at any rate—and without the intervention of private enterprise.

Another event of 1961 was the opening of the £5,500 McLennan Biological Field Station—an institution established by the University of Melbourne. It was built among the tea-tree close to the entrance gate to the village.

During March 1962 yet another fire wrought havoc in the Park. This time more than 20,000 acres of Singapore Peninsula and the country adjoining Barry's Creek were laid waste. The Committee's fire protection expert remarked that the fire was in very remote country and presented no danger to life and property.

As the present author and his wife happened to be camping at Freshwater Cove at the time, the absence of danger to life was not quite as apparent to them as it was to Mr Seaton. They were only a few miles from the inferno and a strong wind would soon have sent the flames roaring up from Chinaman's Long Beach to the Cove. As for it having been no danger to property, this suggests the need for some rethinking on this interesting subject.

The National Park is 'property' – public property. It belongs to all Victorians. The living things that were in and on the 20,000 acres of earth burned in this fire were the property of the community—property that cannot be restored by buying replacements over the counter.

The fire was ascribed to lightning but the two campers at Freshwater Cove, who were rather weather-conscious, noted no electrical storms in the district on the day the smoke first appeared.

In the following October, an interesting 'find' was brought to notice.

A party of schoolboys discovered the remains of an ancient shipwreck among the rocks on the southernmost tip of the Promontory. Mr J.S. Henthorn, the schoolmaster in charge of the party, concluded that

the relics were the remains of a sailing ship which had been wrecked some time between 1750 and 1800—a period suggested by the condition of the nails and the nature of the timber used in the construction of the ship.

The remains of the wreck have endured for, perhaps, 200 years but one cannot even guess how long they have rested on the rocks and sands at South Point.

There are many ships lying beneath the waters off Wilsons Promontory which, some day, may be loosened from their graves on the sea bed and delivered by the winds and waves of that turbulent ocean. Perhaps, some day, there will be a tourist track to the site of these relics at South Point.

The next episode worth chronicling is the visit to the Park in January 1963 by the Victorian Attorney-General, who returned from his excursion fired with enthusiasm for 'unlocking' the National Park. It was his opinion that the Promontory should be developed in the manner of the one million acre Kosciuszko State Park in New South Wales (which God forbid).

Had the area of Wilsons Promontory National Park been anything like Kosciuszko's 1,562 square miles it would have been big enough to safely tolerate some of the contemplated developments but, being as it is, informed opinion recognises that, as a tourist resort, and—to quote the Attorney General— 'one of the loveliest playgrounds in the State' it is now developed practically to the limit of its capacity if it is to continue as a nature reserve and lovely playground.

There is certainly plenty of room for a chain of hotels and motels licensed or unlicensed, placed strategically over the length and breadth of the Promontory.

The high-pressure advertising of the present day would ensure a steady flow of patrons, provided the entrepreneurs were given adequate freedom to develop the place in the way they wished, as has happened on the ski resort at Mount Buller. Private enterprise could be relied on to see to that.

The weekend homes for 'suitable people' as proposed by the Attorney-General would certainly please the suitable people which he had in mind although the unsuitable might not look at all favourably on the idea.

'Development' along the lines suggested for the Promontory could be made to rival Belgrave, Rosebud or Lakes Entrance, even the Gold Coast.

No. This National Park may be said to have been already pretty thoroughly 'unlocked'.

The unlocking began in 1898 when Wilsons Promontory was first reserved as a 'site for a national park'.

The speed with which development is taking place

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in Victoria makes it difficult to forecast the future of Wilsons Promontory National Park.

It is a place well known to and beloved by thousands of citizens, each of whom would have a different opinion about what should be done to develop or even maintain its attractions – but one may be certain of one thing. They would be unanimous that the Park would have little to offer over and above what can be easily found in numerous holiday resorts were it not for the fact that it is a superb nature reserve. It is our earnest hope that it will always remain protected and unchanged.



# Wilsons Promontory: the War Years 1939-1945, by Terry Synan

**T**erry Synan qualified as a secondary teacher at Melbourne University in the mid-1950s. For the next 15 years he taught history and other subjects in State high schools. He then joined Catholic Education and was an administrator and Director in the Diocese of Sale, Gippsland, for 25 years, as well as holding other positions across Victoria. He was a member of the Catholic Education Commission of Victoria, the Victorian section of the Schools Commission, and the Victorian Catholic Schools Association, the industrial arm of Catholic schooling, which he chaired for four and a half years. During retirement he researched the role Wilsons Promontory played in Australia's defences during World War 2. This chapter, written in the 1990s, presents a synopsis of his findings.

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Under the Victorian National Parks Service (NPS) of the Department of Conservation and Natural Resources (CNR)<sup>1</sup>, Wilsons Promontory is one of Victoria's protected natural areas. However, there were times when the Prom in its turn played vital roles in protecting the nation. Since 1859 South-east Point has hosted a lighthouse devoted to assisting shipping through Bass Strait. During wartime, the Prom was assigned key defence roles – in a smaller way during World War 1, but in a large and significant way during World War 2.

Wilsons Promontory is strategically located on the Australian continent. It reaches almost 40 km into Bass Strait, virtually bisecting the important Sydney-Melbourne sea lane and presenting a commanding interrogation post for all ships using that route. When the Department of the Navy, Melbourne, decided to establish lookout-positions around the coastline during wartime, South-east Point with its clear seaward views became a prime location.

Given the historical break in railway gauges between the States, coastal shipping carried 80-90 per cent of Australia's interstate trade. The most important sea lane linked the ports of Sydney and Melbourne. The bulk of international shipping also focused on these ports. Accordingly, enemies had little difficulty in deciding where best to attack when bringing Australia's security under threat.

As WW 1 progressed, the Navy Office (Department of Defence) established War Signal Stations at Cape Howe, Cape Otway and Wilsons Promontory. This strategy was doubtless prompted by a daring German naval raid on the Sydney-Melbourne sea lane.

In November 1916 the raider *Wolf* set sail from Kiel Harbour on a 15-month cruise of the world's oceans, attacking allied shipping and mining shipping lanes. After crossing the Tasman Sea, *Wolf* set down a minefield beside Gabo Island and another near Point Hicks. On 5 July 1917, the

*Cumberland*, a Federal Steam Navigation Company vessel carrying an important cargo of mail, meat, wool, lead, copper and canned fruit, bound for England, struck a mine and had to be beached on Gabo Island. (Loney, 1993)

As a consequence the RAN established a Minesweeping Section in July 1917, and set up lookout positions at Cape Otway, Wilsons Promontory and Cape Howe in April 1918. Other locations followed. A station crew consisted of a Yeoman of Signals, a Leading Signaller and three signallers. They were to report shipping movements, aircraft and any suspicious lights in the vicinity of each station. Naval personnel were accommodated in tents. The South-east Point station ceased operation at the end of hostilities.

## War Signal Station, Wilsons Promontory

With gathering storm clouds in the late 1930s signifying another war with Germany, the Naval Office, Department of Defence, Melbourne, looked again at establishing War Signal Stations (WSSs) at a number of key points around the continent. Consequently, Wilsons Promontory gained a substantial station with a raised signal bridge plus mast and yard arm, as well as draughty unlined huts for storage, accommodation and supply purposes.

The naval crew consisted of an Officer in Command, a Yeoman of Signals, a Leading Signaller, four signallers, a cook, sick berth attendant and an Officer's Steward. The station was established on Commonwealth property at South-east Point on 22 October 1939. Its task was to keep naval authorities informed of all shipping using Bass Strait as well as reporting aircraft movements and other relevant information gathered. Through the use of signal flags and an acetylene-powered lamp, the station became a communications link between naval ships and the Royal Australian Navy, transmitting orders and advice and receiving information from passing ships (Nesdale, 1984). The WSS functioned very efficiently in good weather but in foul Prom conditions sea lane visibility was seriously reduced no matter how powerful the spy glass and binoculars.

In late October 1940, another German raider, the *Passat*, visited Bass Strait's sea lanes and laid a number of minefields. Explaining its erratic course, it signalled the possible loss of a man overboard. Late on the night of 7 November, the British Freighter *Cambridge* struck a mine some 3.5 km off South-east Point and sank with the loss of one life. The surviving crew rowed three lifeboats towards Wilsons Promontory, signalling the WSS to report the sinking. Next day an American ship



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*City of Rayville* hit a mine south of Cape Otway, also sinking with the loss of one crew. Bass Strait was closed to all shipping while a fleet of minesweepers cleared the sea lanes (Loney, 1993).

As the war progressed, WSS Wilsons Promontory continued its vital naval communications work as troop convoys, various naval ships and squadrons and numbers of convoys passed by. It also played an intriguing role in the tragic disappearance of the *Sydney*, sunk off Carnarvon (WA), in November 1941 with the loss of all 645 officers and crew when it encountered and sank the German raider *Kormoran*. Most of the German sailors escaped their stricken ship, and on 27 November the troop ship *Aquitania* signalled South-east Point that it had 26 German crew on board, picked up on 23 November in the Indian Ocean. Fearing the possible presence of enemy craft still in the vicinity, *Aquitania's* captain did not stop or break radio silence to notify authorities of his captives. This communication provided further detail of an unfolding drama - Australia's greatest maritime tragedy and mystery (Olson, 2000). [The site of the sunken *Sydney* was discovered in 2008.]

The Commanding Officer at WSS Wilsons Promontory was Lieutenant Malcolm B Gale. He ran a tight ship, ensuring his crew took all responsibilities seriously. They had to withstand the rigours of chilly gale-force winds and driving rain. From the station's earliest days there were serious communication difficulties between the Lighthouse and the Foster telephone exchange. The telephonic link was often rendered faulty by 'earth leaks', caused when dampness or vegetation shorted the weak electrical signal impulses (Australian Archives, Melbourne 1). This connection also served as a party line for farmers along its route. When the Army and Airforce demanded a share of this overloaded communication link, the Navy justifiably felt outraged. The installation of an AWA teleradio back-up facility did little initially to improve communication reliability. This was only achieved after the Post Master General's Department, stretching its scarce wartime resources, caused the land line to be considerably upgraded.

Sadly, no evidence of this important wartime facility now exists. Buildings and other evidence of the WSS fell victim to the calamitous fire of February 1951 which burnt three-quarters of the Prom from north to south, finally racing onto South-east Point and sparing little besides the lighthouse itself. The front page of *The Argus* of 14 February 1951 had a large aerial photograph of the damage done to the Lighthouse settlement under the banner headline 'This Place is Burning (but the light didn't fail)'. Piles of ashes mark where War Signal Station facilities once stood.

## No 7 Infantry Training Centre

With WW 2 came the proposal from London for Australia and New Zealand to train shock troops, or commandos. Wilsons Promontory, the chosen location for this project, became, as a consequence, a high security 'Top Secret' military area for much of the war period. Relatively isolated, mostly surrounded by sea and with an easily secured isthmus linking it to the mainland, Wilsons Promontory seemed ideally placed and away from prying eyes. The Prom also greatly appealed because it was mostly unsettled National Park containing a rich variety of topographical features and vegetation cover. Accordingly, a considerable range of commando training environments was available – mountains, plains, seascapes, sand dunes, mud flats, swamps, rivers, eucalypt forests, coastal scrub and open grasslands. Access to the area had just been upgraded with a new tourist road to Darby River which linked that area to railheads at Fish Creek and Foster.

Humbling defeats in 1940 suffered by the British in Norway and at Dunkirk at the hands of well-organised German forces, and the capitulation of France, left London's military strategists with no land army in Western Europe opposing the Nazi menace. Their thoughts turned to using commando units in order to carry out fast-moving sabotage and intelligence missions. They were also concerned that Nazi, Fascist and Japanese fifth-column cells were active in various countries. As a consequence, Military Mission 104 was dispatched to New Zealand and Australia to advise on military intelligence and to set up an Independent Company Training Centre at Wilsons Promontory (Callinan, 1989).

Called No 7 Infantry Training Centre, it had a Headquarters Camp at the Darby River, a No 1 Camp adjacent to the present-day Lilly Pilly Gully car park, and a No 2 Camp in the location today occupied by the Tidal River camping area. Headquarters Camp had two sections. One, north of the Darby River bridge, had sufficient floored tents to sleep 35 Non-Commissioned Officers (NCOs) and Sergeants, 46 Corporals and 62 Privates. The other, south of the bridge, incorporated the Chalet and tents for 56 Officers. Both sections contained mess huts, lecture huts, ablutions and latrines, a combined kitchen plus store rooms and workshops. The old Chalet served as part of the Officers' facilities. A canteen hut stood on the south side of Darby River close to the bridge. Initial Cadre and NCO training occurred at Headquarters Camp. It also contained a Camp Dressing Station with six beds, a signals workshop, explosives stores and an Armourers workshop. Army Instructional personnel, Army transport units and other service corps members were located at the Darby River camp. (Australian Archives, Melbourne, 2)

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No 1 Camp near Lilly Pilly Gully contained tent accommodation for a complete Independent Company, plus three mess huts, and other huts for lectures, recreation, storage, drying and ablutions, as did No 2 Camp at Tidal River. The latter was built to train New Zealand Independent Companies and was paid for by the New Zealand Government. Both camps had canteens and a field firing range nearby. (Australian Archives, Melbourne, 3)

The Military Mission was lead by Lieut.-Colonel J C Mawhood, who served in the Australian Army during WW 1 but had later gained both Indian army and intelligence experience, including some association with M15. He had with him a team of four expert soldiers and a shipment of the latest explosives and infantry weapons available in Britain. His team also included Captain Freddie Spencer Chapman, fieldcraft; Captain Michael Calvert (Mad Mike), engineers and explosives; Warrant Officer Frank Misselbrook, signals and wireless telegraphy; and Warrant Officer Peter Stafford, weapons training.

On completing their Australian – New Zealand training assignment, the four soldier specialists were posted to India and South-east Asia to fight the Japanese war. Calvert became famous first as a daring assistant to the legendary Major-General Orde Wingate in Burma, and later during the Malayan emergency, where he became pivotal in developing modern SAS-style forces (Weale, 1997). He and Chapman left indelible impressions on the New Zealand and early Australian Independent Companies trained under their direction. Command of No 7 Infantry Training Centre went initially to Major W.J.R. Scott DSO, one of Australia's most intriguing military personalities of the two world wars and the inter-war period. He played an important role with the secret armies of the 1930s (Campbell, 1965). Scott handed command to Major Stuart Love, also a much-decorated WW 1 soldier, in May 1941.

At the outset a military-use agreement was struck between the Defence Department and the Victorian Government, which held title to the National Park. Premier Albert Dunstan and Park Committee members Messrs Northey, Chairman, and Kershaw, Secretary, agreed to the military using the area but negotiated for certain conditions that would provide some level of protection for the Park and the resources of the Park Committee. The Army agreed to the issuing of special orders to troops aimed at a level of protection for this sensitive ecological area. It also agreed that road construction from Darby to Tidal River and the water supply systems it had to install would remain as tourist facility improvements. The Department of Defence agreed to pay compensation for use of the Chalet and for Committee loss of revenue during army occupancy.

The Army agreed to leave facilities in a similar state of repair to that when their occupancy commenced. In order to have some insight into what might be occurring in the Park, it was also agreed that the Committee would retain its two Rangers, though the Army would pay their wages (Australian Archives, Melbourne, 4). As events turned out one ranger, Alf Miller, joined the army. Only John Sparkes continued in the Ranger role during the war years.

The Defence Department held an option to purchase the Committee's 23 hire horses, though this was never exercised. However, the Committee was released from its agreement with Mrs Clendenning, the lessee of the Chalet, who was compensated by the Department, as were the various holders of grazing rights. The Department also agreed to purchase a small bungalow at the Chalet which was on offer to the Park Committee.

During 1941 and 1942 eight Australian and two New Zealand Independent Companies trained at Wilsons Promontory. A company comprised 273 soldiers. It possessed a higher proportion of officers than regular army units – a Major commanding, five Captains and eleven Lieutenants. Its sub-structure consisted of three platoons, each of 60 men commanded by a Captain. Platoons contained three sections each with a Lieutenant in charge. Independent Companies also had medical staff, engineers or sappers, a transport section, a signal section and a wide range of skills in those selected to join them (McNab, 1998).

Intended to operate independently of larger army groups, they carried a wider assortment of weapons including pistols, rifles, light machine guns, sub-machine guns, mortars, grenades and signal pistols. All members had to have completed basic training prior to recruitment and were expected to display initiative, a spirit of adventure, and superior military skills. Recruits had to be young and exceptionally fit physically. Other Army commanders were directed by Headquarters to send forth the names of only their best soldiers.

Each Independent Company undertook its commando training in two parts. First the officers and NCOs received six weeks of intensive training from instructional staff. In turn the officer cadre trained the ordinary ranks at No 1 and No 2 Camps for another intensive six weeks. Once this was completed the Independent Companies were formed from the soldiers who stayed the course. Training involved a strict timetable of lectures, field exercises, physical endurance tests, air-army co-operation exercises and amphibious naval exercises. A typical training day could include fieldcraft experience, demolitions, a hill climb and swim, physical exercises and weapons training. The day's program commenced at 8.00 am, finishing at 8.30 pm. Night lectures or a night march which



Trainee commandos crossing grassland at Wilsons Promontory, c.1941.  
Photo courtesy Historic Places, Department of Sustainability and Environment, Victoria

included wading the Darby River in battle order might follow. A map-reading exercise would be combined with a cross-country treasure hunt or a battle exercise between opposing Australian and New Zealand Troops (Larson, 1945). Exercises were undertaken in full battle dress with full packs using live ammunition and simulating war conditions. Men were taught how to blow up buildings, bridges, communications facilities and army vehicles as well as how to use field radios and co-ordinate activities to meet up with pre-arranged air drops of food and ammunition. Camouflage was studied, as was ambush, these being backed up with lectures on commando tactics and infiltration techniques.

No 7 Infantry Training Centre was formally established in January 1941. In February the training of the Officer Cadre and NCOs commenced for the 2/1<sup>st</sup> Independent Company along with No 1 New Zealand Special Company. The 2/1<sup>st</sup> Independent Company was formed at Wilsons Promontory in May 1941 when training finished. On 7 July, it began the move to Sydney and on 12 July it left on the *Zealandia* for Rabaul and the islands north of New Guinea where, as part of 'Lark Force', it added to Australia's forward defence strategy. New Zealand No 1 Special Company did reach the war location Australian companies initially expected to go to – North Africa and the Middle East. Sadly, however, they never fought as a unit but were split up by General Fryberg around various other New Zealand

units. Similarly, No 2 New Zealand Special Company never served as a unit, although some of its members did join and train commando units in the Pacific fighting the Japanese. It seems the Hush Hush Companies, as the New Zealanders called them, were too hot to handle for that country's military and political leaders, and as a consequence great military opportunity was lost to the allies.

The other Australian Independent Companies include the 2/2<sup>nd</sup>, sent to East Timor as part of the ill-fated 'Sparrow Force', the 2/3<sup>rd</sup> sent to New Caledonia, the 2/4<sup>th</sup> which relieved the 2/2<sup>nd</sup> in East Timor, and the 2/5<sup>th</sup>, 2/6<sup>th</sup>, 2/7<sup>th</sup> and 2/8<sup>th</sup> all of which acquitted themselves with honour fighting Japanese forces in New Guinea and the Solomons. All these units had a significant impact on the Pacific War. For a period in early 1942, the 2/2<sup>nd</sup> Independent Company, fighting a classic guerilla war, was the only allied force not defeated or neutralised by the all-conquering Japanese forces following Pearl Harbour. The 2/1<sup>st</sup>, however, had a tragic war. Many of them had been held captive by the Japanese at Rabaul and were being transported in the *Montevideo Maru* in June 1942 bound for internment on Hainan Island in the South China Sea. The American submarine *Sturgeon*, unaware that this ship carried 1050 Rabaul captives, sank it, killing all prisoners on board including 133 Independent Company personnel (McNabb, 1998).

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No 7 Infantry Training Centre soon became known as the Guerilla Warfare School, Foster, and in time Independent Companies were reorganised into Commando Squadrons. However, as the Pacific and not the European war became the focus of military endeavour, Army authorities recognised that this facility would be more useful if it operated in a tropical rather than a cool temperate location. In November 1942, therefore, the training school moved to Canungra, Queensland, causing the Army to have a realistic look at the future of the Wilsons Promontory facility.

During its short life training ten top army fighting units, No 7 Infantry Centre had been considered by the Army as a showpiece of military initiative. Many highly placed foreign military personnel were sent there to see the facility and witness what it achieved. It also played a secondary role no longer recalled: it trained cadre groups from Northern Command which, in turn, were planned to form guerilla bands in Australia's North. Had an invasion of mainland Australia occurred these units would have been used to cut supply lines and harass and ambush invaders from behind in classic guerilla warfare style. Also trained at Wilsons Promontory were officers from all States serving with the Voluntary Defence Corps (Australian Archives, Melbourne, 5).

The continuance of the Wilsons Promontory Camp came into question as the decision to close the Guerilla Warfare School eventuated. On 30 September 1942 an inspection of facilities revealed a serious problem with sewage and sillage disposal. Some camp areas had become fouled and considerable expenditure was required to put matters right. By late November, Major General E.C.P. Plant, the General Officer in Command in Victoria, proposed that the Prom site be abandoned, even though the original agreement with the Victorian Government was to keep it for army use until the end of hostilities.

A high-placed inspection group visited the area on 28 and 29 December, including seven senior army personnel plus a Mr F Russell (IGA) and Messrs Northey and Lulie from the Lands Department, Victoria. In view of previous undertakings, it was considered unfair to hand the Chalet back at a time when the Park Committee would have found it impossible to re-let, or indeed to use the National Park. (National Archives, Melbourne, 6).

Damage to the site required a large amount of restoration and compensation. There was damage to the Chalet, fencing (including the rabbit-proof fence), missing gates, a need for parade-ground grass restoration, and various trenches and observation pits to be filled in. Sensitive sand dune areas were blowing and in need of marram grass plantings. Car wrecks used for demolition practice needed clearance, and

items were missing from the Chalet inventory. At the time of this inspection the Army was removing camp equipment, so a further inspection was arranged to finalise proposals for the State government. Certain buildings and installations, such as the hospital block and sanitary and ablution blocks at Darby River, would be retained by the State for Park Committee use. No 1 Camp was declared of no use by the Committee, and there was a concern that facilities at No 2 Camp Tidal River were 'wrongly placed' for peace-time park operation. Electricity generating capacity and water facilities were left operative but most huts and installations were marked for demolition or removal. Lastly, a year's rental was allowed to compensate against loss of Committee revenue for the duration-of-war clause. State Government was charged for the bungalow that the Defence Department had earlier secured.

While all these matters were being sorted out the 2<sup>nd</sup> Australian Medium Regiment came to Wilsons Promontory complete with heavy trucks towing field guns for military exercises from 1 January to 17 March 1943. Demolition of huts and buildings commenced on 23 March. Huts were conveyed in sections to the Fish Creek railway yard and sent by rail to Melbourne for distribution to locations such as Camp Pell, Caulfield, Broadmeadows, Point Lonsdale, Dandenong, Harrisfield and Fisherman's Bend. The latter location gained 12 of the buildings. Two huts were retained at the Prom for use by the RAAF at Yanakie in a quest to improve the quite poor facilities at the aerodrome (Australian Archives, Melbourne, 7).

## **AOB Yanakie**

The RAAF's familiarity with Wilsons Promontory dated from the 1930s, when it used Yanakie as a landing field during training flights from Point Cook. Photographs exist of a flight of Westland Wapitis landed there. During 1935 Messrs Pilkington, Sandy Point, and Grimshaw, Fish Creek, had a contract to scoop away the sand ridges on the airfield and grade the area level. Messrs M. Farrell and Hamilton of Fish Creek were also employed on this project (Noonan, 1969). In 1938 the Lyons Ministry announced a major defence program upgrade. In recognition of Australia's vulnerability against aircraft launched from enemy surface raiders, it contained funding to develop and upgrade coastal air defences. Consequently, within Gippsland, aerodromes were developed at Mallacoota, Bairnsdale and Yanakie. Other airfields were built at Apollo Bay, Pat's River (Flinders Island) and Currie (King Island), ensuring Bass Strait's strategic protection. The strategic importance of Yanakie and many other such fields was officially recognised when they were declared





Wilsons Promontory lighthouse, 1950s.

Photo courtesy Historic Places, Department of Sustainability and Environment, Victoria

Advanced Operational Bases (AOBs) soon after WW 2 commenced.

Mr Charles Snell, a contractor in the Foster district, won the contract to extend Yanakie airfield so that it became capable of handling medium bombers and reconnaissance planes in all weathers. Because of a good depth of sand, landing and take-off areas were grassed and unmarked. The East-West area allowed 1.6 km; the North-South 1.3 km. Fencing was necessary to keep the airfield free of native animals and agisted stock. Various airfield facility buildings were constructed on the southern side of the area and included fibro-cement living quarters, a wireless hut, a bomb dump and galvanised iron sheds for storage, latrine, fuel store and a pyrotechnic store. During the course of the war twelve rainbow-shaped dispersal hangers or hideouts were framed up with camouflage netting covering them. They were located on the southern and western sides of the aerodrome well back in tea-tree scrub and linked to the landing area by taxiways.

In early 1942 the State Defence Camouflage Committee, Victoria, submitted a proposal for AOB Yanakie. It proposed a 'Farm layout' whereby cattle could be turned onto plots using obstruction fences to give the appearance from the air of a farming property. The RAAF living quarters, with a front verandah added, might resemble a farm house while all other buildings could be made resemble various farm sheds. The idea of cattle roaming the airfield found no favour with the RAAF. In fact the particular location of this airfield, surrounded by mountainous terrain, swamps, and sand dunes, concerned the RAAF authorities and prompted a request for a 'more open aerodrome' further north beyond Yanakie (Australian Archives, Canberra, 1). In 1941 the east-west runway direction was lengthened westward and the Yanakie Road diverted around it. Bushfires and grass length hindering planes taking off

were other concerns for the RAAF.

Yanakie aerodrome had two main purposes. It was part of the coastal surveillance system, and a vital link for aerial convoy escort duty. A small housekeeping staff, consisting of about a dozen airmen, operated and maintained AOB Yanakie. This number was augmented by up to 25 additional airmen when planes came in from patrol or other duties for crews to rest overnight. In the early days of WW 2, No 2 Squadron carried out anti-submarine and convoy escort duties using Avro Ansons, and later Lockheed Hudsons. Other units to use Yanakie included No 7 Squadron when it was based at Bairnsdale in mid-1942, and No 1 Operational Training Unit flying out of East Sale. However, the major user, after its formation in January 1943 at Laverton, was No 67 Squadron. It was a general reconnaissance RAAF unit with 14 Avro Ansons. It had responsibility for anti-submarine patrols and southern sea-lane escort duties and flew from Laverton, Warrnambool, Yanakie, Bairnsdale and Mallacoota (RAAF Units, History, 1995). It carried out continuous seaward patrols in the early months of 1943 when Yanakie was at its busiest. There were a number of possible submarine sightings during this period but no reported 'kills'. However, some non-combatant whales mistaken for submarines lost their lives by mischance. During the early years of war up to six aircraft per day used Yanakie, but as hostilities moved away from Australia, aircraft use frequency declined to three or less per day.

At war's end the RAAF indicated it had no further use for Yanakie, so responsibility for the airfield fell again to the Department of Civil Aviation. Mr Perc. Gilbert became caretaker in 1946 with responsibility for keeping the airfield operative, but few planes landed there. He and his family lived in the former RAAF accommodation. When Civil Aviation took charge he was appointed groundsman, a position he held until 1949. In 1969 the southern portion of the Yanakie area, including the airfield, was added to the National Park.

### No 14 Radar Station

The fourth military installation located on Wilsons Promontory during WW 2 was the most secret of all its military facilities. No 14 Radar Station was located on Commonwealth property at South-east Point, tight up against the Lighthouse on its seaward side. The former operations concrete blockhouse now serves as an observation area for viewing Bass Strait. This facility, built in the early war years, housed state-of-the-art radar equipment under RAAF operation. Mounted atop this structure was a large rotating array or aerial measuring 15 by 18 feet. No 14 Radar Station was one of a set protecting the sea lanes along the southern coastline to the Port of Melbourne. Others were at Cape Otway, Metung and Gabo Island. They provided

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eyes over Bass Strait, monitoring shipping and aircraft movements. Together these stations were part of a large network of radar installations dotted around the Australian coastline and in some strategic inland locations (Simmonds, 1995).

Radio Direction Finding (RDF) technology, developed in the United Kingdom, proved invaluable during the Battle of Britain. With adaptation to Australian requirements, RDF became more portable and flexible. This allowed relative ease of installation in difficult locations. The equipment installed at the Prom was Australian designed and manufactured. When set up in June 1942, it was as sophisticated as any systems then operating. Accordingly the highest level of secrecy applied even after the war ended. As a result, RAAF personnel, such as those staffing the Prom unit, only years later received the acknowledgment due to them for their significant wartime contributions.

When No 14 Radar Station began operating the Commanding Officer was Pilot Officer S.D.L. Horwitz. He had a staff of 35 personnel under his command. They included radar operators, mechanics, guards, cooks, a mess orderly, a clerk and fitters to maintain the petrol motors and generators providing station power and electricity for the living quarters constructed at the Lighthouse settlement.

No 14 Radar Station operated on a 24 hour cycle, using four six-hour shifts. Each shift had four radar operators and one mechanic. Operators varied their work every half-hour. Given the mental and visual fatigue involved in reading the small cathode ray oscilloscope or 'tube', efficiency would decline if an operator stayed on that task longer. Other assignments included plotting object movements on a grid-referenced map of the area, and passing plot details by telephone onto No 7 Fighter Sector in the Preston Town Hall. Fighter Sector received information from all Victorian radar stations and took decisions on further necessary steps. It could request that the radar station continue tracking a particular object, or order an aeroplane to check out the area and, if necessary, take military action.

The heart of the radar station was the tube in the receiver unit with its thin green horizontal trace or line bisecting the screen horizontally. It represented, from left to right, 0 to 130 miles. On the trace line operators observed small vertical movements or 'grass'. A shift in the length of the 'grass' indicated that the transmitter and receiver equipment had picked up an echo or 'blip' from the direction the aerial faced. The aerial gave the bearing, and adjusting the blip to the centre of the tube measured the distance. From this information a plot was made on the map. Continued readings gave a series of plots for transmission to Fighter Sector.

Operationally, No 14 Radar Station proved to be a very difficult facility. Not only was it quite isolated, making it hard for personnel to reach, it was also difficult to provision with stores, fuel and equipment. The *Cape York* conveyed all heavy materials to the flying fox running from the landing ramp up to the Lighthouse settlement. RAAF staff had to man the fox each week to land fuel and other stores. Mail, meat and bread were conveyed by Army pack horses along the Lighthouse track every second day. Leave-takers had to run or walk this track and a contest developed as to who could do the fastest time. Fit leave-takers covered the 15 mile trek to Tidal River in under 3 hours. However, in winter the track became a line of bogs churned up by the horses.

Of even greater difficulty was the severe weather experienced on the exposed Lighthouse peninsula. Winds would quickly gather to gale-force strength and rain would be driven into the huts. In such conditions the array had to be tied down fixed in one direction, an event repeated with much frequency. The radar station could then operate only on a fixed bearing, or cease operations altogether for several hours or days. This defect combined with periodic equipment failure, which also proved difficult to rectify because of the isolation (Australian Archives, Canberra 2).

However, when the radar equipment functioned well, this station produced remarkable results, identifying ship movements up to 30 miles distant and aircraft at 60 miles and beyond. In good conditions some 100 or more plots per day would be passed onto Fighter Sector. In difficult conditions the number halved or dropped to zero.

As the Pacific War moved north, performance pressure on No 14 Radar Station diminished. This was reflected in manning levels. The Operations Record Book reveals establishment numbers dropping to two Officers and 30 other ranks in March 1943, then to a total of 26, July 1944 and 17 in October 1944, and to 12 in May 1945. When the station closed in November 1945 it was staffed by only six personnel. On 15 August 1945, the operations entry was brief and to the point: "Received news of Japan's surrender". Then began the work of packing up sensitive equipment ready for loading on the *Cape York*. On 12 December the 'top secret' facility was removed, allowing the Prom eventually to return to the peace-time role which Victorians had earlier designated for it, and which it still retains – a National Park to be used to protect nature and 'for public purposes'.

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### Footnote

<sup>1</sup> [As of 2008 the NPS is part of Parks Victoria and CNR  
has become the Department of Sustainability and  
Environment – Ed.]

# Wilsons Promontory National Park: 1946 to 1998, by Daniel Catrice

**D**aniel Catrice, formerly Historian with the Department of Sustainability and Environment (Victoria), wrote this account of the post-war history of Wilsons Promontory National Park in 1999-2000. It covers the period from 1946, when the national park was reopened to the public after World War II, to the 1998 centenary of the park's establishment.

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The Committee of Management resumed control of Wilsons Promontory National Park on February 1, 1946. For six years the park had been inaccessible to the public. Now it began to attract nationwide attention as reports came to light of the damage done to the park during its occupation by the Army. In an editorial in *Wild Life* magazine the well-known naturalist and broadcaster Philip Crosbie Morrison claimed there was hardly a living thing left on the promontory, and roundly condemned the use of the park for training men to 'live off the land' – men who, 'bored with inaction, were ready to shoot anything that moved' (*Wild Life*, May 1946). He called for a stock-taking of our national parks, warning that 'if we do not have a post-war New Deal for the fauna and flora, the birthright of the coming generations will have gone, and, once gone, it can be replaced by neither money nor toil nor tears' (*Wild Life*, May 1946).

In reality, the poor condition of the park was as much a result of a prolonged drought and infestation by rabbits as of soldiers' depredations. Cattle grazing also exacted a heavy toll. In 1946, a Royal Commission found that the Prom was a 'ghost of its former self' due to grazing and frequent burning. The Commission's report recommended that all grazing should be excluded from such areas, 'some of which are being ruined in the quest of a miserable revenue won at the expense of their beauty and well-being' (Report of the Royal Commission into Forest Grazing, 1946).

In April 1946, Crosbie Morrison put the following motion to a meeting of the Field Naturalists Club of Victoria (FNCV): 'that the [Club] registers its abhorrence at the destruction of protected fauna in the Wilsons Promontory National Park as reported in the Press and witnessed by some of its members, and stresses the need for a comprehensive plan for post-war rehabilitation of this and all our other fauna and flora sanctuaries' (*The Victorian Naturalist*, 63, 1946). The Club unanimously adopted the motion. It immediately set about preparing a comprehensive plan for the rehabilitation of Wilsons Promontory and 'all our other fauna and flora sanctuaries'. Later in the year, it convened the first of a series of conferences to discuss ways of achieving this goal, and to ensure that future conferences were fully informed, it appointed a National Parks and National Monuments Committee to



Front page of *The Argus* newspaper 14 February 1951, after much of the Prom had been burnt by a bushfire.

Photo courtesy Historic Places, Department of Sustainability and Environment, Victoria

investigate the condition of all Victoria's national parks.

The committee published a detailed report and organised a further two conferences before passing a series of resolutions for the enactment of appropriate legislation and the establishment of an authority to oversee the management of Victoria's national parks. The conference appointed a Permanent Committee to promote these reforms. Crosbie Morrison was elected Chairman, and J. Ros Garnet was elected Secretary.

Meanwhile, the Committee of Management began the task of 'rebuilding' the park. Their activities were centred on Tidal River where the Army had left a number of buildings. In 1946, the committee moved the park headquarters from Darby River and by Christmas, walking tours and day visits had re-commenced. Overnight camping was not permitted until Tidal River Camp opened to visitors in 1947 (VPRS 11552/P1, Unit 163, File 7/6). Other activities carried out by the committee during these first years included the construction and maintenance of tracks, rabbit control, tree planting, repairs to fences and the management of grazing.

In 1951, a devastating bushfire threatened to sweep away all the Committee of Management's work. The fire was believed to have escaped from a 'billy fire' left unattended at Tin Pot Waterhole, outside the northern boundary of the park. After burning for some time unchecked, it was driven by a westerly gale along Vereker Range to the lighthouse, a distance of approximately 30 kilometres.

According to Crosbie Morrison the fire burned for a fortnight and scarred nearly 75 per cent of the park (*Wild Life*, June 1951). When the Victorian National Parks Association (VNPA) visited the park in 1954, the





Track up Mt Oberon in 1953, showing regrowth after 1951 fire. Photo courtesy Historic Places, Department of Sustainability and Environment, Victoria

touring party saw little animal and bird life. Lilly Pilly Gully was a scene of 'terrible desolation'. (*The Victorian Naturalist*, 71, 1954). So extensive was the damage that the VNPA believed there was nothing was to be gained by tourists visiting the gully and that the track leading to it should be closed.

Over the next decade, the Committee of Management continued to focus develop Tidal River as a 'tourist resort'. Visitor numbers increased dramatically, from 100 during Christmas 1951 to 3,600 during the same period in 1956 (VPRS 11552/P1, Unit 163, File 7/6). This rise was partly a result of the increase in car ownership during the 1950s, which made national parks more accessible. Increased economic prosperity and the introduction of the 40-hour week in 1948 also meant that people had more time and money for leisure. National parks became popular tourist destinations, offering visitors an 'escape from the pressures of business and modern living' (NPA Annual Report, 1960 cited in Anderson: 115).

Unfortunately, many committees of management came to rely on the revenue generated by tourism. Money from camping fees and lodge accommodation at Tidal River provided much-needed funds with which the Committee of Management employed three permanent staff, including one ranger and an assistant ranger,

and a temporary staff of six. To make Tidal River more attractive to campers and day visitors, a new store was built in 1956 and a café opened in 1959 (VPRS 11552/P1, Unit 331, File N/W/1). With each development, pressure mounted for additional services and amenities that were often contrary to the preservation objectives of the national park. In 1960, for example the Committee of Management considered a proposal to establish an 18-hole golf course below Mt. Oberon. This, according to the proponent, 'would encourage people to the Prom and would be consistent with the National Parks Act which seeks to provide enjoyment for visitors' (VPRS 11552/P1, Unit 163, File 7/6).

Many naturalists were concerned about the rapid development of Tidal River. In 1954, the newly formed Victorian National Parks Association (VNPA) conducted a tour of Wilsons Promontory and warned that Tidal River was at risk of being over-developed. VNPA Secretary J. Ros Garnet observed that the establishment of caravan and camping grounds would ultimately destroy the natural beauty of the area, 'as has happened along the Port Phillip foreshore.... from Dromana to Rye' (*The Victorian Naturalist*, 71, 1954).

Garnet's solution was to establish a second camp settlement in the northern section of the park. The ideal location, according to Garnet, was the old township

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site of Seaforth on the Singapore Peninsula. Although the Committee of Management never seriously contemplated this option, Garnet's observations did prompt discussion about the purpose of the national park. The committee acknowledged the importance of protecting the flora and fauna of the park, but as it received no direct funding from the government, it was impossible to manage the area exclusively for nature conservation. This was the crux of the problem, as Garnet observed, 'the Committee [at Wilsons Promontory] were largely dependent on anti-conservation elements like tourists and cattle graziers for the revenue which it needs to do developmental work of any kind, and until a new concept of wildlife management is accepted by our legislators, both elements are likely to take precedence over conservation' (*The Victorian Naturalist*, 71, 1954).

Legislation was the critical issue. At the time Garnet was writing, the State government had already received deputations in support of legislation to control national parks and had introduced a Tourist and National Parks Development Bill in the spring session of parliament, 1952.

As a first attempt at regulation, the Bill was a promising initiative, though it had many shortcomings. It took a narrow view of national parks as tourist destinations rather than areas set aside for nature conservation. It did not provide for the permanent reservation of national parks, nor did it properly define the areas that could be proclaimed under the Act. There was a surprising degree of unanimity on the need for legislation, however the Bill lapsed when the Country Party government was defeated on 28 October 1952.

At the same time, a decision was made to establish the VNPA. Officially launched in July 1953, the Association became the main proponent of national park legislation. The *Age* welcomed the new association, commending the 'public-spirited men and women' who had come together 'as one body in a determined crusade to protect and preserve what is best in our past and to hold on the natural treasures of the present' (cited in Pizzey 1992).

The VNPA convinced the government that national parks and tourist resorts should be the subject of separate pieces of legislation. In January 1954 it published its objective for a National Parks Act providing for: an Authority to administer national parks; permanent reservation all parks in such a form that revocation or excision would require an Act of parliament; and national parks sufficient in number and variety to contain selected portions of all landscape types.

These objectives were put to the Premier, Henry Bolte, who agreed to introduce a Bill in the autumn

1956 session of parliament. Bolte also invited the VNPA to prepare a draft Bill, which was presented to the Premier in March 1956. Cabinet considered draft legislation in May, and a Bill was introduced to the Legislative Assembly in October of the same year.

On 30 October 1956, the *National Parks Act* was proclaimed. It included a schedule of thirteen national parks, including Wilsons Promontory, and appointed a National Parks Authority to administer the legislation. The Authority was constituted under the new Act on 7 May 1957. Crosbie Morrison, whose reports on the condition of Wilsons Promontory had prompted the campaign for legislation, was appointed the Authority's first Director.

The formation of the NPA brought major changes to the way committees of management administered national parks. The first task was the re-appointment of committees under the new legislation. Next, was the infinitely more delicate task of imposing control. With a permanent staff of just two and a budget of £4,300, the NPA had no capable management structure for the national parks under its control. The continuing support of committees of management was therefore critical if the new authority was to succeed.

On most issues the NPA and the Wilsons Promontory Committee of Management worked amicably together. There were differences of opinion however, and these emerged most forcefully in discussions about two critical issues: 're-stocking' of the park; and the supply of electricity to Tidal River.

Since the first settlement of the 'Prom' many different species of flora and fauna had been introduced, deliberately either to acclimatise game species or to preserve native species, or accidentally through invasion by 'feral' exotics (Seebeck & Mansergh 1998). By the 1950s, the Committee of Management had settled on a 're-stocking' program that treated the park as a kind of 'Noah's Ark'. According to the committee 'the ideal aim would be to make the Park a repository for breeding colonies of all those Victorian plants and animals which, in other parts of the State are in danger of extinction owing to destruction of natural habitats and other courses thus preserving them for posterity' (VPRS 11552/P1, Unit 163, File 7/6). This objective was contrary to NPA policy. Initially, the committee refused to accept the policy, claiming that re-stocking of the park was one of its primary aims. For many years the committee continued its activities – after all, who could say with certainty what species were indigenous to the park – but by the mid 1960s it appears to have accepted the NPA ruling and ceased the practice altogether (VPRS 11552/P1, Unit 137, File 7/6/3).

A second debate arose over the proposal to supply





Looking over Oberon Bay beach, 1965. Visitor numbers to the national park grew rapidly in the 1960s and 70s.  
Photo courtesy Historic Places, Department of Sustainability and Environment, Victoria

electricity to Tidal River. Like the discussions about re-stocking the park, this issue was seen as a confrontation between the ‘purists’ of the NPA and the ‘practical men’ of the Committee of Management. The plan to supply Tidal River with electricity was opposed by the NPA for aesthetic reasons, *i.e.* the visual impact of unsightly power poles and electricity easements, and because of the increased risk of fire. It concluded that ‘SEC power’ was unnecessary, as local power generators were reliable and adequate. At Tidal River by 1964, there were 31 buildings, 10 toilet blocks, a café, store and streetlights served by six power plants. The committee argued that local power supplies were not adequate, particularly if Tidal River was to develop further as a tourist centre. It believed that a power line would not do great harm. ‘It was a matter’ said the committee, ‘of weighing the practical against the aesthetic’ (VPRS 11552/P1, Unit 137, File 7/6/3). But the NPA held firm, and to this day Tidal River still relies on generators rather than mains electricity.

Considering the autonomy that the committee enjoyed in the era before the formation of the NPA, the additional controls and scrutiny were accepted with surprising equanimity. This is all the more surprising as the committee was still obliged to finance the greater

share of management costs. Expenditure and revenue was estimated for each financial year and the NPA contributed the shortfall. In the 1965-66 financial year for example, expenditure was estimated at £66,045 with an expected revenue of £37,620 to which the NPA were asked to contribute £28,425 (VPRS 11552/P1, Unit 137, File 7/6/3).

In this year, the park attracted 71,000 visitors, almost a three-fold increase since 1958 (Smith 1965). The increase in visitor numbers placed additional strain on facilities and infrastructure, especially at Tidal River during peak periods. In 1960, the government entered into negotiations with a Mr. R.E. Unger who had sought approval to build a Chalet at the ‘Prom’. The proposal was supported by the Minister for State Development, A.J. Fraser, who referred the matter to the NPA which, in turn, recommended the granting of a lease. By this time, September 1960, the proposal was centred on a hotel complex for 600 guests with a 200-acre golf course at Pillar Point overlooking Norman Bay. The proposal was scaled down after discussions with the NPA, and in November 1960 Unger formally applied for a lease of 50 acres but warned that the lease area was ‘hopelessly inadequate’ for his purposes (VPRS 11552/P1, Unit 330, File N/W/1).

At its meeting in December the NPA and the Committee of Management supported the proposal in principle, but on condition that public tenders be invited and that the lease not exceed 10 acres. Pillar Point was endorsed as the location, but the golf course proposal was rejected 'although consideration may be given to an area for golf on the flats at Darby' (VPRS 11552/P1, Unit 330, File N/W/1).

News of the proposal was made public in February 1960, prompting a storm of protest from individuals and organisations as diverse as the VNPA, the Youth Hostels Association, the RMIT Explorers Club, the Bairnsdale Field Naturalists Club, and the West Brunswick Progress Association. The Women's Christian Temperance Union weighed into the debate, opposing the sale of liquor at the proposed hotel; garden designer Edna Walling pleaded that 'the sanctuary not be invaded by businessmen' (*Age*, 4 March 1961). Others feared that the hotel would be the 'thin edge of the wedge' and that 'the Prom would finish up like Surfers Paradise – with more sharks on land than in sea' (VPRS 11552/P1, Unit 330, File N/W/1).

There was support for the proposal, from people who preferred to 'holiday in comfort' and from groups like the Gippsland Lakes and Alpine Tourist Council who believed that hotel would provide much-needed accommodation in the park (*Age*, 10 March 1961). Others merely opposed the construction of the hotel at Pillar Point, the FNCV deciding at its meeting on April 10, 1961 to ask the government to have the hotel situated at Darby River (*The Victorian Naturalist*, 78, 1961). But for the majority of people who either wrote to the Minister, or the NPA or metropolitan newspapers, the 'Prom' was a special place that needed to be protected from over-development, and for whom 'roughing it' was an integral part of their holiday experience (VPRS 11552/P1, Unit 299, File 35/5/6).

In November 1962, despite public opposition, the NPA re-affirmed its commitment to the hotel lease. Of the three tenders received by the NPA, two were later withdrawn, leaving Rudy Unger as the sole applicant. Unger was subsequently granted the option of a lease of 10 acres on the western slopes of Pillar Point. Over the next five years, Unger, now operating as Chalet International Pty. Ltd. and the NPA argued over the terms of the lease. Unger refused to accept a limit of 10 acres and was adamant that he should be granted a full victuallers licence, 'including open bars where liquor could be sold in bottles and cans'. He also resented the 'undue interference' of the NPA in matters of building design and landscaping and demanded the right to provide 'adjuncts to pleasant living and holidaying' outside the lease area such as bathing facilities on the foreshore and a jetty for visiting boats. The NPA was equally adamant that the lease area would be a

maximum of 10 acres, and that the sale of liquor would be restricted to hotel guests (VPRS 11552/P1, Unit 330, File N/W/1).

Supporters of Unger's proposals accused the NPA of stifling Victoria's fledgling tourist industry and pointed to similar developments at Yosemite National Park in the USA and Banff National Park in Canada. The Director of National Parks, Dr. Len Smith, no doubt familiar with park management practice overseas, responded that a resort of the type proposed by Unger might be better situated outside of the park, for example at Waratah Bay. Of the decision to hold firm against granting a liquor licence, Smith concluded that the NPA was bound, 'if its integrity is to be maintained to be guided by the dictates of its collective conscience' (VPRS 11552/P1, Unit 330, File N/W/1).

By February 1964, agreement had been reached for the construction of a 'motel' at a new location, Bishop Rock, about a mile from Tidal River. Unger hoped to have the motel operating by the end of the year, with accommodation for about 50 guests (*Herald*, 29 February 1964). The question of the liquor licence was still the obstacle. Negotiations dragged on for over a year. In August 1964 the NPA ended negotiations, but in July 1965 it approved a draft lease, and in November NPA Chairman, J.W. Manson was proclaiming that a chalet for 150-200 guests would be in operation by Christmas 1966. Despite the confident assertions of the NPA, in 1967 negotiations between the NPA and Unger were terminated by 'mutual agreement', no doubt to the relief of Dr. Smith, and the chagrin of the developer (VPRS 11552/P1, Unit 331, File N/W/1).

This left the question of accommodation at Wilsons Promontory still unresolved after seven years of argument and ultimately fruitless discussion. The NPA convened a sub-committee to look into the matter. It met in January 1968 and observed that additional tourist accommodation was still needed, and that demand was best met by a modern motel. In a delightful piece of irony, which would have had Rudy Unger dizzy with frustration, the sub-committee concluded that as the NPA did not have the funds to build a modern motel, 'it would be necessary to grant a lease to a private person or organisation for this purpose' (VPRS 11552/P1, Unit 331, File N/W/1).

Protracted lease negotiations were not the only feature of these years. The coastal strips excluded from the reserve in 1908 were added to the national park in 1947, and in 1964 the Minister for Lands agreed to add the Yanakie Run to the park subject to the condition that agistment continued. The NPA agreed to the condition and in 1969, the area of the park was increased by 7,422 hectares (VPRS 11552/P1, Unit 331, File N/W/1). Also in 1969 the islands of the Glennie



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group (excluding Citadel) were added to the park, and a small area of land at Refuge Cove was temporarily reserved for a national park (VPRS 11552/P1, Unit 331, File N/W/1). The area at Refuge Cove had somehow been excluded from the national park and was being used as a permanent camp which rangers had no authority to dismantle.

Visitor numbers increased steadily throughout the 1960s. Mid-way through the decade, in 1965-66, over 70,000 visitors came to the park; in 1974-75, the figure had risen to 156,000 (Cooper 1975). The increase was partly due to a burgeoning interest in all national parks. By 1970-71, the total number of visitors to Victorian national parks had exceeded half a million (Anderson 2000: 123). The increase was due also to the greater promotion of Tidal River and the natural attractions of the 'Prom'.

From the early 1960s the NPA published a small pamphlet about the facilities available at Tidal River. The Victorian Railways Department added to the literature in 1967, publishing *Sentinel of the South*, which included descriptions of each lodge, including the number of beds and rental charges, as well as general information about the park. By the end of the decade the NPA were also promoting activities and self-guided walks, such as the Whale Rock Nature Walk and the Lilly Pilly Gully Nature Trail. Algona Guides published a comprehensive guidebook in 1971, and in 1982 the VNPA and the Department of Conservation, Forests and Lands released the popular *Discovering the Prom on Foot* [revised in 1999 as *Discovering the Prom* and still available(2008)].

For rangers and other park staff, the growing popularity of the 'Prom' meant more work and longer hours. Amongst their other duties, rangers issued camping and walking with permits, answered inquiries (sometimes in the middle of the night), organised and led guided walks, and helped keep the campground in good order. During peak holiday season, they had to deal with a myriad of problems, including litter, theft and vandalism, rowdy behaviour and the removal of vegetation. With a permanent staff of just two rangers, seven labourers and one tracksman, rangers were hard pressed to conserve and protect the biological diversity of the park. Indeed, when the NPA asked the Committee of Management to prepare a management plan in 1971, the committee responded by stating that Wilsons Promontory was operating mainly as a 'tourist centre' with insufficient staff to properly attend to its functions as a national park (VPRS 11552/P1, Unit 55, File 5/6).

Instead, the Committee of Management commissioned a master plan for Tidal River. Completed in 1970, the plan proposed a maximum carrying capacity of 12,000 people at any one time, of which

no more than 5,000 would be day visitors. This was a significant increase on the then maximum capacity of 7,000 visitors per day. It was to be achieved within 5-10 years by extending the camping area and increasing the number of lodge beds from 156 to 530 (Perrott *et. al.* 1970: 14).

The committee never implemented the master plan. It was too ambitious and, without major investment by government, too costly to achieve. Moreover, the NPA was reluctant to back further development at Tidal River if this was to be achieved at the expense of conservation programs.

The NPA stance was symptomatic of a new, biocentric rationale for park management that came to the fore in the 1960s. At a local level, this was due to a better awareness of the natural values of the Promontory. Publications like Don Saunders' *The Ferns and Flowering Plants of Wilson's Promontory National Park* and Ros Garnet's *The Wildflowers of Wilson's Promontory National Park* brought the botanical richness of the 'Prom' to the attention of the reading public. By 1975, a mammal survey was under way, and a ten year survey of the ecology of the birds of the Promontory had been completed (Cooper 1975). Rangers were also becoming more skilled and knowledgeable. Ranger training courses were held in 1963, 1965 and 1967, with a fourth course held at Wilsons Promontory in 1969 where rangers were instructed in ecology, entomology, botany, track location, conservation, fire protection, first aid and interpretation (Anderson 2000: 114). Rangers could also attend fire protection courses organised by the Forests Commission of Victoria.

At the same time, 'conservation' emerged as a political issue. By 1970 there were over 200 conservation societies in existence in Australia (Anderson 2000: 152). Newly-formed groups like the Australian Conservation Foundation joined with established organisations to demand a better deal for the environment. The Victorian government responded in 1970 by passing a new *National Parks Act*, which established a National Parks Service to replace the NPA. Three years later the National Parks Service (NPS) was incorporated into a new Ministry of Conservation which brought together the Soil Conservation Authority, the Environment Protection Authority, the Land Conservation Council, and the Fisheries and Wildlife Division.

A new *National Parks Act* was proclaimed in 1975. Committees of Management became advisory committees to the Director of National Parks and the NPS became fully responsible for park management. The Wilsons Promontory Committee of Management was appointed an advisory committee on December 1, 1975 (VPRS 11552/P1, Unit 136, File 7/6/1). Compared

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to the committee of management, the new advisory committee was relatively powerless, and for a short while the old tensions resurfaced between the 'practical men' and the 'purists'. The South Gippsland Shire Council called the new advisory committee a 'toothless tiger'. It accused the NPS of stifling local expertise in favour of the expertise of technical officers in government departments 'who may not have the local knowledge' (VPRS 11553/P1, Unit 42, File 76/1242).

For their part, members of the Committee of Management appear to have willingly handed over control to the NPS. Park management had become a highly skilled, complex and time-consuming activity. In 1982, for example, Wilsons Promontory, along with Croajingolong, Hattah-Kulkyne and Murray-Kulkyne National Parks were declared Biosphere Reserves under the UNESCO 'Man and Biosphere' program. For sixty-five years the committee had guided the development of Wilsons Promontory with greater care and commitment than might have been expected from a diverse group composed of unpaid and untrained citizens. It handed the park to the NPS in far better condition, and better protected, than when it had resumed control in 1946 after the wartime occupation.

The NPS introduced a professional, multi-disciplined approach to park management. One area significantly improved by the NPS was park interpretation. Guided walks, junior ranger programs, nature trails, displays and talks became an integral part of a visit to the 'Prom'. School groups visited in greater numbers. In November 1973, Head Ranger Steve Watkins reported that twenty-nine school groups had visited the park in the last three months and another twenty-five schools had advised of intending camping visits before the Christmas holidays (VPRS 11552/P1, Unit 137, File 7/6/3). So great was the demand that Watkins requested the secondment of an officer from the Department of Education. In 1975, the NPS established an interpretation branch, with responsibility for producing brochures, distributing information to the public and fostering interpretation services in parks. An Information and Education Centre was built at Tidal River in 1982-83, replacing the old museum that had been a feature of the park during the 1950s and 60s.

Throughout the 1980s and early 1990s, the number of visitors to national parks continued to rise. By 1997, there were approximately 11 million visits to parks managed under the National Parks Act (Anderson 2000:212). Of these, about 370,000 visited Wilsons Promontory, making it one of Victoria's most important tourist destinations (Parks Victoria 1997a: 21). Tidal River was Victoria's most popular national park campground, with overnight accommodation for 4,100 people at one time, and a maximum day-visitor capacity of 3,000 people (Parks Victoria 1997b: 6). So great was

the demand that the NPS introduced a ballot system for camping in holiday periods and for overnight walks to 'outstation' campgrounds.

In 1996, the National Parks Service released a draft Master Plan for Tidal River and a draft Management for Wilsons Promontory National Park. Amongst other things, the Master Plan recommended the NPS investigate the feasibility of developing a serviced lodge for up to 150 people and that it develop an overnight lodge for 45 people undertaking commercially-guided walking tours in the park. As in the 1960s, there was great community concern about the development proposals. The VNPA led the opposition, arguing that the 'lodges' were inappropriately situated, that they placed further strain on park infrastructure and facilities and would lead to still further demand for access and buildings that would 'overtax the park's already stretched natural resources' (*Park Watch*, December 1996). On December 29 1996 the VNPA organised a gathering of nearly 2,000 people on Norman Beach to spell "Hands Off".

The NPS received 3,238 submissions on the draft management and master plans. On January 17, 1997 the Premier announced a revised plan of management, the first time according to the VNPA that a Premier had intervened in a management plan for a park (*Park Watch*, March 1997). The proposal to build a 150-bed 'hotel' was abandoned, but the principle of additional roofed accommodation and improved services was upheld 'to ensure Wilsons Promontory is accessible to a wider range of visitors' (News Release, Office of the Premier of Victoria, January 17, 1997).

The announcement was an important victory in the campaign to protect national parks from commercial development, but it was not a decisive win. Nor was it an end to the debate about commercial development in national parks. As far as the VNPA were concerned, the proposed developments at Tidal River were part of broader move to exploit parks for their tourism appeal. Major concerns included plans to build a visitor centre at the Twelve Apostles in Port Campbell National Park, proposals to develop the Nobbies at Phillip Island and the excision of 258 hectares in the Alpine National Park for incorporation into the Falls Creek Alpine Resort. However, it was the 'Prom' that attracted the greatest interest and support. In November 1998, the VNPA organised 'The Really Great Prom Walk' from Tidal River to Melbourne. On the final day of the walk, over 2,000 people gathered on the steps of Parliament House to protest against commercial development in the national park.

The year 1998 was also the centenary of the first, temporary reservation of Wilsons Promontory as a site for a national park. The centenary was officially marked

by the opening of a new footbridge over Tidal River and a walking track from the lighthouse to Waterloo Bay. The year also provided an opportunity to reflect on the considerable achievements of the past and to acknowledge the many people whose commitment and foresight had secured the park for future generations. Park managers, naturalists and nature-lovers, campers and campaigners had made the 'Prom' one of Victoria's best-loved and most-visited national parks. Even the so-called villains in the piece, the commandos who occupied the park during the war and the developers who envisaged luxury hotels and golf links, played their part. They helped park managers and legislators define the national park concept and roused the public to express their views about what made the 'Prom' special.

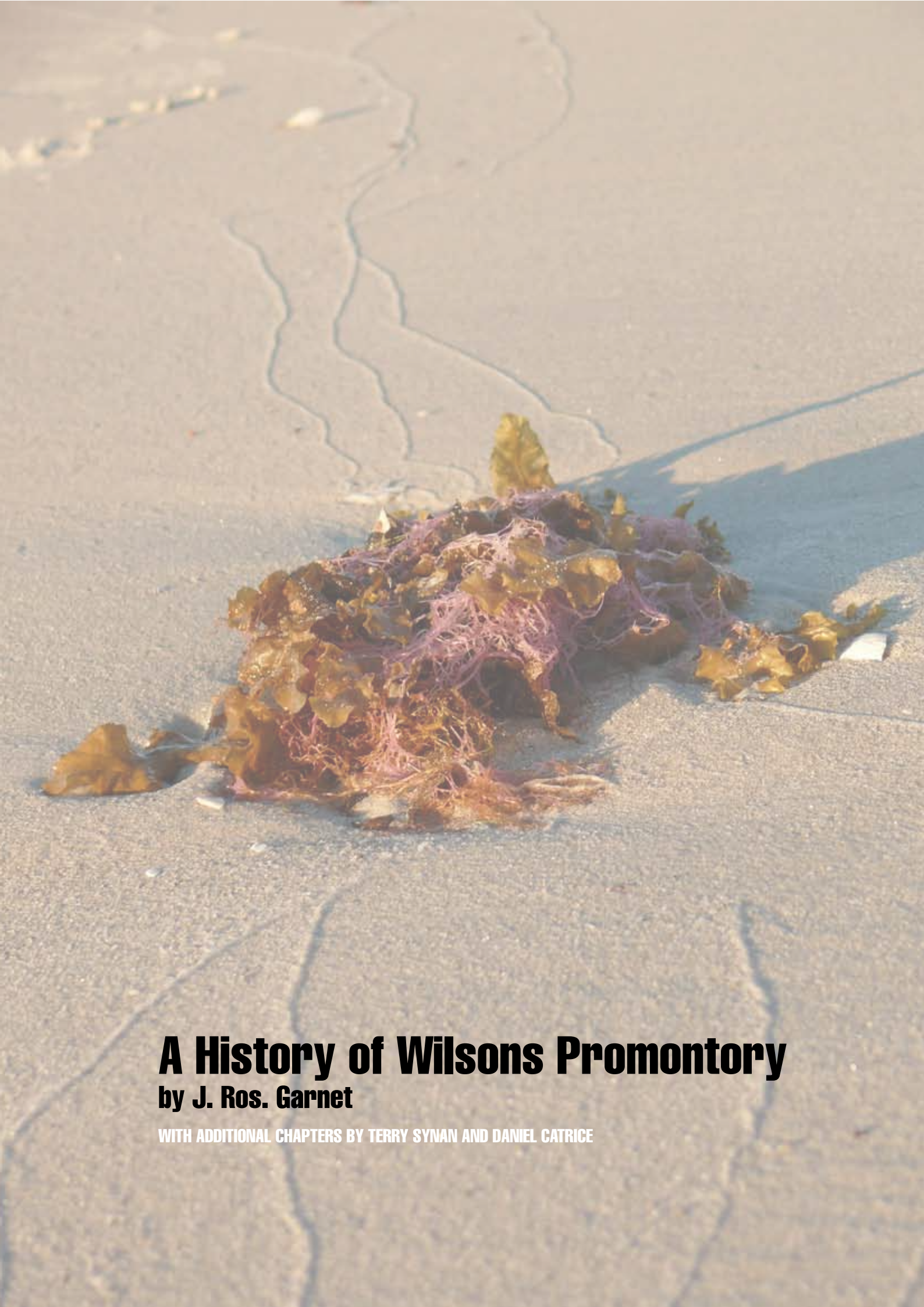
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# **A History of Wilsons Promontory**

**by J. Ros. Garnet**

**WITH ADDITIONAL CHAPTERS BY TERRY SYNAN AND DANIEL CATRICE**