



# CONSERVATION JOURNEYS

A short history of the VNPA



CHAPTERS ONE TO FOUR



The VNPA's two main founders with their families in the early 1950s. Left, Philip Crosbie Morrison with wife Lucy and sons James (left) and Tom (died 1978) in 1952. Right, Ros Garnet with his wife Elsie (third from left), daughter Joan (left), son John (right) and friends at Britannia Creek, 1953. Photos: courtesy Historic Places DSE, and John Garnet

## Celebrating 60 years of the Victorian National Parks Association

The world's first national park came to pass not in Victoria, nor indeed in Australia. The first country to encircle a remarkable, beautiful and important tract of land in a protective embrace was the United States of America, with the establishment of Yellowstone National Park in 1872.

Australia followed suit with Royal National Park near Sydney in 1879. Victoria, always progressively minded, reserved a small area at Fern Tree Gully in 1882, and then Wilsons Promontory and Mt Buffalo, our first 'real' national parks, in 1898.

The formation of these parks was not an isolated moment in time; rather, those events and our own history are entwined strands in the much wider conservation movement story that spans decades, borders, generations and philosophies in equal measure.

Today, Victoria boasts 45 national parks, 13 marine national parks, 11 marine sanctuaries, and numerous other parks and reserves. The VNPA name, and the names of our supporters, stand behind the creation of many of these areas. This is a remarkable achievement for an association that is less than half the age of Yellowstone.

And so, the decision to chronicle the history of the

VNPA lies in part because we are justifiably proud of our achievements and should celebrate them. But above this, we want to remind ourselves that the things the VNPA stands for have international and national significance – just as our native plants and animals are part of the web of life, so the role we play in protecting them makes us part of a movement that is critical to ensure that natural life on earth, particularly in our unique corner of the planet, survives and flourishes into the future.

What the VNPA will chronicle 60 years hence will depend on social, environmental and political factors, some of which we can reasonably expect to face, and others which we may never see coming. What we are confident will be chronicled, however, is that with your support, one of the voices heard speaking out on behalf of Victoria's wild places and wildlife will be ours.

This is the first chapter in the VNPA's history, taking the story to 1956 and the passing of Victoria's National Parks Act, the first in Australia. As a celebration of our 60th anniversary, subsequent chapters will be released throughout 2012. We hope you enjoy reading it, and we welcome any feedback or comments you may have.

Matt Ruchel, Executive Director.



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Cover photo: Victoria's Alpine National Park, by Paul Sinclair.

# CHAPTER 1: FOUNDATION & EARLY YEARS

## 1.1 The foundations of national parks protections – pre-WWII

In the Victorian National Parks Association Newsletter of September 1955 the following unsourced definition was presented:

### A NATIONAL PARK DEFINED

*A national park is an area under public control, dedicated and set apart for the protection and preservation of indigenous plant and animal wildlife, of features of special scenic, historic or scientific interest and for the benefit, edification, education and enjoyment of the people.*

*Its boundaries shall not altered nor any portion made capable of alienation except by the Parliament.*

*It shall be a sanctuary the natural resources of which shall not be subject to commercial exploitation and within which the hunting, killing or capturing of fauna and the destruction or collection of fauna is prohibited except by or under the control of the park authorities.<sup>1</sup>*

While modern definitions of national parks are more complex and tend to nominate and place greater emphasis on such matters as biodiversity, ecosystems, cultural heritage and minimum sizes,<sup>2</sup> this 1955 depiction of a park was indicative of the advanced environmental knowledge, philosophy and ambitions that were driving the VNPA in its lobbying to establish an appropriate national park system and level of protection in Victoria.

Even then, national parks were not a new concept and their purpose and role had undergone significant change over time. As human populations increased and Europeans spread across the planet in the nineteenth century, on a scale never seen before, the threats to the natural environment became increasingly apparent. One response was public interest in 'natural history', the publication of numerous field guides and the

establishment of organisations to study and experience nature and its elements. Unfortunately, 19<sup>th</sup> century enthusiasts were also collectors who played a role in denuding natural places of the very things that were being studied. However, later in the nineteenth century the camera and other less obstructive and destructive means of observing and recording became popular.

Another response to degradation was a drive to preserve and protect areas of natural significance, often as 'national parks'. At first, the underlying purposes of government and the non-scientific general public were largely anthropocentric, aesthetic and recreational. Most early national parks were areas of natural beauty that were set aside largely to protect them for future human enjoyment, and while scientific and species protection motives were present they were often secondary. Variations on the idea were apparent in many countries, but it was Yellowstone (1872) in the United States that is generally recognised as the first true national park.

In matters of conservation, the Australian colonies tended to follow the American example, rather than the British as they did in most other matters, and soon the colonists were mentioning the need to create their own reserves and parks. A number of reservations were made, but the first to be designated a national park was in New South Wales in 1879, the area south of Sydney which is now the Royal National Park.

Victoria also established several reservations that would subsequently become part of national parks – although the status and nominations of reservations makes it problematic to identify the earliest 'true' national parks. A reservation was made at Ferntree Gully in 1882 which was

later somewhat inappropriately called a national park and in due course was absorbed into the Dandenong Ranges National Park. The first Victorian reservation to be given the title of a national park was Tower Hill in 1892, a status that meant very little in terms of protection and the reserve was subsequently downgraded to a game reserve.

In 1898 significant reserves were declared at Wilsons Promontory and Mt Buffalo, both of which, along with Ferntree Gully, came to be referred to as national parks. In 1908 the Wilsons Promontory reservation was upgraded to a more permanent 'national park'. This move followed a lobbying campaign by a number of august organisations and individuals which appears to have been initiated by a letter from Melbourne ophthalmologist James Barrett to the *Argus* in February 1908. He was highly critical of the neglect of Wilsons Promontory and pointed out that although the area had been reserved for protection it had been badly degraded by cattle grazing. Further agitation by Barrett and others led to the grazing licences being cancelled in June and the government deciding to upgrade the reservation to a permanent national park and to appoint a committee of management. Professor Baldwin Spencer was appointed chair of the committee, and one of its prominent members and a significant campaigner for national parks in future years was Arthur Mattingley, one of the founders of the Australian Ornithologists Union.<sup>3</sup>

Building on that success, in October 1908 Barrett convened a meeting of interested organisations to establish a National Parks Association of Victoria (no connection with the present organisation), which had Barrett and Professor Baldwin Spencer



**Tower Hill as painted by Eugene von Guérard in 1855. Much of the vegetation was cleared in the 19th century, but Tower Hill still became Victoria's first official national park in 1892. This painting was used to guide revegetation from the 1960s on. Warrnambool Art Gallery, Victoria.**

Image: courtesy National Gallery of Victoria

as its joint honorary secretaries. A public meeting was then called which filled the Melbourne Town Hall on 2 December 1908, to air the issues surrounding the neglect of existing reservations and to call for new ones. Resolutions were passed calling for 'the reservation of land, &c, at Mallacoota and Wingen [sic] (now spelt Wigan) inlets, East Gippsland; the islands surrounding Wilson's Promontory; a national park in the Mallee; and the erection of simple memorials to mark the routes travelled and the landing places of the early explorers.'<sup>4</sup> In May 1909 a deputation

took these resolutions to Premier Murray and, although he responded favourably to the suggestions,<sup>5</sup> there was little further enhancement of Victoria's parks in coming years. The National Parks Association continued lobbying for parks in conjunction with other activities such as seeking to establish monuments to explorers<sup>6</sup> – national parks and national monuments were often joined as a common cause until the 1950s. In 1914 the Association was absorbed into the Town Planning and Parks Association, which at times also called itself the Town Planning and National Parks Association.

Barrett was a major force in this new Association and he continued periodically to push for a better deal for national parks until his death in 1945.<sup>7</sup>

Although further reservations were declared in the years up to the outbreak of WWII, notably Wyperfeld National Park in 1921, to speak of Victorian 'national parks' prior to 1956 is rather problematic. The suite of reserves, some of which had the title of national parks, varied considerably in their official status and most had very low levels of protection and management. Those

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**Eugene von Guérard's 1857 painting 'Ferntree Gully in the Dandenong Ranges' encouraged visitors to the area to see its tree-ferns and other plants. In 1882 it became Victoria's first official protected area, a 'site for public recreation', but was not made a national park until the 1920s. National Gallery of Australia, Canberra. Gift of Dr Joseph Brown AO OBE, 1975.**

Image: courtesy National Gallery of Victoria

areas subsequently absorbed into the post-1956 National Parks system were Fern Tree Gully, Wilsons Promontory, Mount Buffalo, Bulga, Werribee Gorge, Tarra Valley, Wyperfeld, Mallacoota Inlet, Wingan Inlet, Lind, Alfred, Sperm Whale Head, Kinglake and the Dandenong Police Paddocks.

During the 1930s and 1940s there was growing concern, perhaps a sense of alarm, among mainly Melbourne-based networks of scientists, public servants and 'amateur' naturalists about the degradation of the State's water systems, the need for soil conservation and the mounting loss

of species. Most prominent among them was the Field Naturalists Club of Victoria (FNCV) and a number of individuals connected with it.<sup>8</sup> The FNCV had been established in 1880 in a period when there was keen amateur and professional enthusiasm to experience and study Australian 'natural history'. It worked largely through monthly lecture meetings, frequent excursions and an informative newsletter to share and spread the interests of its members across the coming decades – and set a pattern which would subsequently be largely duplicated by the VNPA.<sup>9</sup>

Prominent among other groups

that were concerned about environmental degradation were bird watchers (Bird Observers' Club, Gould League of Bird Lovers and the Royal Australasian Ornithologists' Union (RAOU) and bushwalkers (Federation of Victorian Walking Clubs (FVWC), Melbourne Bush Walkers, Melbourne Walking Club and Victorian Mountain Tramping Club). The Victorian Advisory Council on Flora & Fauna was also active in the 1930s and 1940s.<sup>10</sup> Two new bodies were established in the 1940s: in 1944 the Save the Forests Campaign which in 1951 became a non-profit company retitled the Natural Resources Conservation

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League of Victoria,<sup>11</sup> and in 1945 a relatively short-lived Council of Scientific Societies.<sup>12</sup>

An example of the work of these groups was a deputation to the Minister for Lands on 9 August 1939 on the subject of 'national parks and primitive areas'. The deputation consisted of James Barrett (Town Planning and National Parks Association), A.S. Kenyon (Historical

Society of Victoria and FNCV), A.G. Campbell (RAOU), G.N. Hyam (FNCV) and J.F. Matthews (FVWC). They represented a grouping of twenty-nine organisations that were concerned about the need for controlled planning of leasing of Crown land containing 'primitive' areas, to stop them being spoiled and to enable the creation of new national parks. The deputation

gave a detailed account of the degradation of Victoria's 'primitive areas and national parks' and nominated several regions that they wished to see become national parks.<sup>13</sup> Even if other circumstances had been favourable, however, this was a doomed effort as WWII began just over three weeks later.

## 1.2 Post-war rise of conservation

The decades after WWII saw the beginning of dramatic economic, philosophical and contextual changes for the worldwide environmental movement. While war had been immensely destructive of the global environment, the return to peace eventually brought even wider degradation. Major technological advances during the war were applied in peacetime, such as better tanks paving the way for better bulldozers and chemical research promoting the use of artificial fertilisers and pesticides such as DDT. Developed nations returned to prosperity, in due course achieving a higher level of personal affluence than previously experienced and with greater personal consumption. Human populations rose rapidly in most countries, and the impact on the planet spread in proportion.

Such conditions promoted alarm among environmentalists about the increasing degradation and disappearance of natural heritage. There was also a slight transition occurring in their philosophy or motivation. Whereas anthropocentric utilitarian motivations for protection had been uppermost half a century before, there was now less emphasis on protecting scenery or 'national monuments', and on preservation for the sake of future scientific study or availability for human purposes. Among the most aware, and this included many of the people associated with the FNCV and the other Victorian naturalist organisations, there was a conceptual understanding of the importance of biodiversity and ecosystems and a sense that 'nature' had an intrinsic value beyond human benefit. Among the wider public, however, such concepts did not gain wide currency until the later 1960s and 1970s.

One of the main triggers to renewed activity in Victoria after

the War was the widely renowned writer, editor and broadcaster Crosbie Morrison (1900-1958 and President FNCV 1941-43). [see biography, page 10] An educated, erudite and perceptive naturalist, he had been concerned about environmental degradation and the state of the 'national parks' for many years. However, a visit to Wilsons Promontory in early 1946 shocked him profoundly. The army had taken over the reservation for commando training during the War and, combined with the effects of fires, drought, rabbits and ongoing grazing, much of the Promontory's vegetation and fauna had been damaged or destroyed. In May 1946 Morrison took up the threats to Victoria's flora and fauna and its degraded national parks in an editorial in the journal he edited, *Wild Life*, in which he remarked that 'Our first urgent need is a stocktaking to find what is gone, and how much is left... 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.'<sup>14</sup>

Morrison described the degradation of Wilsons Promontory to a meeting of the FNCV and was supported by another member, Margaret Wigan, who had also recently visited the park. Arthur Mattingley was present and he pointed out that the Defence Department had promised that there would be no damage to flora and fauna, but that the promise had not been kept. Morrison again called for a stocktake of all the State's national parks and he moved, seconded by Margaret Wigan, 'That the F.N.C.V. registers its abhorrence at the destruction of protected fauna in the Wilson's 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; and that this motion be passed officially to both State and Federal authorities'.<sup>15</sup>

As attention turned to the State's national parks and reserves it became apparent that the problems were far more widespread than just Wilsons Promontory. A number of management committees had become defunct, and as they were not funded by government some of the remaining ones had become so desperate for income that they had leased parts of the parks for grazing and timber cutting. As Morrison later recounted, one of the worst examples was at Tower Hill:

*The local Borough Council was appointed as the Committee of Management (each National Park is nominally controlled by a committee consisting of public spirited citizens acting in an entirely honorary capacity), and in recent years this Council has attempted to 'develop' the area as a people's playground. At one stage the internal slopes of the crater were being 'improved' to provide a track for motor-cycle racing, and funds for the 'improvements' were being raised by quarrying road-metal from the very feature the park was created to preserve.*<sup>16</sup>

Another element that since the 1920s had promoted environmental concern was increasing soil erosion and siltation of water systems caused by a combination of bad agricultural practices, bushfires, overgrazing and grazing in forest country. Justice Leonard Stretton, who had conducted a Royal Commission into the 1939 bushfires, was appointed in mid-1946 to undertake an inquiry into forest grazing, and his report was highly critical of licensed forest and mountain grazing, particularly on Mount Buffalo.<sup>17</sup>



In this atmosphere the FNCV called a meeting or Conference of allied societies and other interested bodies to discuss a course of action on Wilsons Promontory and, more broadly, grazing in national parks. The meeting, held on 7 June 1946 and chaired by Morrison, was attended by delegates from more than twenty organisations. It established a National Parks and National Monuments committee (later generally referred to as the Standing Committee) to investigate the condition of the Promontory, and to explore how to improve protection and administration of the park system. Among its members were Crosbie Morrison as Chairman (Trustees of the National Museum, Melbourne and active in the FNCV), F.S. Colliver (FNCV), J.R. Garnet (Australian Association of Scientific Workers and prominent in the FNCV), E. G. Stewart (FVWC) and Margaret Wigan (first woman President of the Bird Observers' Club of Victoria and a long-term member of the FNCV).<sup>18</sup>

That Committee met in June 1946 and decided to widen its inquiry to all Victorian national parks, and also delegate the task of investigation to the FNCV, which had its own similarly-named sub-committee on National Parks and National Monuments. The FNCV committee consisted of George Hyam (Chairman, former President and Vice President of FNCV, retired from Department of Agriculture), J. Ros Garnet (Secretary), Stan Mitchell and Colin Lewis (former employee of the Fisheries and Game Department now active in FNCV). Over the next two years they undertook a detailed examination of Wilsons Promontory and the other parks<sup>19</sup> and in June 1948 produced a widely-circulated 'Report on the National Parks and National Reserves of Victoria' containing damning criticisms and

several recommendations.<sup>20</sup>

The Standing Committee met in July 1948 to consider and adopt the report, which was then submitted to the second meeting of the Conference a week later.<sup>21</sup> In essence the main aims of the report, and of the movement in coming years, were to bring the current and new reserves under new legislation to establish a single state-wide national parks authority that would identify and recommend new areas deserving to be declared national parks and would supervise well-resourced and skilled local management committees. Because of limited time, this meeting of the Conference endorsed only five initial resolutions which were considered to be of particular importance:

1. That the Victorian Government be asked to enact legislation to ensure the adequate control and management of Victoria's National Parks and Reserves of like nature.
2. That all the several types and classes of Reserve dedicated to the use of the public and the protection of nature and to the preservation, of historic, scenic and natural monuments be defined in and covered by the Act.
3. That the projected Act provide for the creation of a single corporate Authority to administer such control and management.
4. That the Authority be endowed with sufficient funds from general revenue to administer the Act effectively.
5. That the Authority be empowered to recommend the acquisition and proclamation as a National Park or Reserve of any object, site and/or area which, in its opinion, should be so reserved in the interest of posterity.<sup>22</sup>

The Standing Committee continued to meet during 1948 and in December reported to the third Conference meeting, at which five further resolutions were adopted.

These set out in more detail the nature of the national parks authority that was being advocated and the system of management.<sup>23</sup> A major figure in all of these developments and reports was the FNCV Secretary J. Ros Garnet, who was also secretary to both the FNCV sub-committee and the Conference's Standing Committee. At this critical time in 1948 Garnet stepped down as FNV Secretary, but in order to become its President. His workload and achievements were enormous. [see biography, page 10]

All this publicising, lobbying and writing was rewarded by the government agreeing in late 1948 to refer the matter to a parliamentary standing committee, the State Development Committee, which was given the task of inquiring into the national parks issue.<sup>24</sup> Garnet, Hyam and E.G. Stewart were invited to give evidence. In September 1949 Morrison, Garnet and representatives of a number of organizations conducted a deputation to the government,<sup>25</sup> and in October Garnet and others again gave evidence to the State Development Committee.<sup>26</sup>

The SDC report was finally released in November 1951. It was highly critical of the state of the parks and adopted many of the recommendations that had come from the Conference and the FNCV committee. However, there was a significant change of flavour in that the SDC prioritised tourism over biodiversity protection as the main focus of a proposed National Park and Tourist Authority that would be responsible to the Minister of Tourist Development.<sup>27</sup>

It is worth pausing here to recognise the mounting importance of tourism and the dilemmas that it creates for people concerned with environmental protection. In the

years after WWII there began the period of mass use of the motor car and of greater public mobility. The number of people able to reach and enjoy 'the bush' and state reserves for picnics or camping rose exponentially. In many respects increasing nature appreciation was good, but more people meant more pressure on accessible sites and higher demands to provide facilities that were not always in tune with nature protection. There was, and is, some public resentment at 'locking up' the country in national parks and other reserves. In the

1950s tourism to the bush and reserves was on a much smaller scale than it would become in the twenty-first century, and of course did not involve the widespread use of 4WD vehicles. However, visitation was on the increase and there were mounting pressures to open parks to greater numbers of people and to commercial enterprises that could develop and exploit the parks. Such ideas were anathema to the principles of national parks as outlined in the definition of at the start of this chapter.

Therefore when legislation

along the line of the SDC recommendations, the Tourist and National Parks Development Bill, was prepared and was presented to the parliament in October 1952, it aroused mixed pleasure (legislation at last) and concern (the direction it took). Besides the emphasis on tourism, there was angst that the legislation did not provide for an independent Director of the proposed authority. However, political instability led to a change of government and the legislation lapsed.<sup>28</sup> Perhaps that was not entirely unfortunate!

## Biography: Crosbie Morrison and the formation of the VNPA

Many people were involved in the formation of the VNPA in 1952, but the most important public figure was Philip Crosbie Morrison (1900–1958).

For older members of the VNPA, Morrison's name will be familiar from his multitude of writings and films about wildlife, his school broadcasts, his extraordinarily popular and long-running nature radio programs on 3DB and 3UZ, and a short-lived television series.

What may not be as well known is the major role he played in the formation of the VNPA and in working towards a better national parks system in Victoria.

To read Crosbie Morrison's biography by Graham Pizzey is to be almost overwhelmed by Morrison's activities and achievements. He was a keen amateur naturalist who in 1925 graduated as a zoologist and then worked mainly as a journalist until he was poached in 1938 by the Herald & Weekly Times to found, edit and write much of a natural history and conservation magazine, *Wild Life* – a task he did until 1954. For much of that time he also presented radio broadcasts and was a popular public speaker.

Morrison was also an activist and an active member of many organisations,

including the Field Naturalists Club of Victoria (FNCV – President 1941-43), the Royal Society (President 1949-51) and the Royal Australian Ornithologists Union. He was a Trustee of the National Museum of Victoria and Chairman from 1955 to 1958.

### CONCERN

In the middle of the 20th century the steady loss of flora and fauna in Victoria, under pressure from agriculture, development and introduced species, was a profound source of concern for Morrison and other conservationists. Even the so-called 'national parks' were in severe decline from inadequate legislative protection, poor administration and no government funding.

Wilsons Promontory NP (established in 1908) was seriously degraded by military use during WWII and by fire and rabbits, while across Victoria park management committees (where they existed) resorted to leasing parks for grazing, timber cutting and quarrying in order to raise revenue.

Morrison took up the threats to Victoria's flora and fauna and its degraded national parks in an editorial in *Wild Life* in May 1946 in which he called for a 'New Deal' for the parks and reserves. Perhaps on his initiative, the FNCV called together a

Conference of about twenty conservation and nature organisations which met on four occasions between 1946 and 1952, and which Morrison chaired.

The Conference delegated to a subcommittee the task of inquiring into the state of Victoria's reserves and preparing recommendations for legislation to establish a proper system. The central planks of its recommendations included legislation that would consolidate the protection of national parks, and establish a National Parks Authority headed by a Director who would supervise wellfunded and properly instituted local management committees.

As it drew towards the end of approving these recommendations, the Conference decided in 1952 that there should be a new and permanent organisation to continue its work. It would comprise organisations and individuals interested in the preservation of areas of scenic, historical or scientific interest.

### VNPA ESTABLISHED

A provisional Council established under Morrison developed a constitution which was approved at a meeting on 26 November 1952, at which the Victorian National Parks Association was formally





**Philip Crosbie Morrison (left) with Committee of Management members at Mt Buffalo National Park, 1957.**

Photo: courtesy DSE Historic Places.

established and its Council appointed, with Morrison as President.

On 1 July 1953 the first Newsletter was published. It quoted the objects of the Association, which are listed on the next page.

The Council consisted of P. Crosbie Morrison (President), J. Ros. Garnet (Hon. Secretary), Hugh Wilson (Hon. Treasurer), A.W. Burston, E.T. Charlton, Prof. J.N. Greenwood, J.M. Harkins, F.P. Hill, Jack Jones, T.E. Kilburn, Fred Lewis, R.T.M. Pescott, N. Richards, E.G. Stewart and (the only woman) Miss M. Wigan. The Corporate Members were the Bendigo Field Naturalists' Club, Bird Observers' Club, Gould League of Bird Lovers, Field Naturalists' Club of Victoria, Maryborough Field Naturalists' Club, Melbourne Bushwalkers, Melbourne Walking Club, Native Plants Preservation Society of Victoria, National Museum of Victoria Trustees, Portland Field Naturalists' Club, Royal Australasian Ornithologists' Union, Sunraysia Field Naturalists' Club, Victorian Compost Society, Victorian Mountain Tramping Club and the Youth Hostel Association.

There were also about eighty individual members.

Morrison's chief ally in the FNCV, the Conference and in the establishment and operation of the VNPA was J. Ros Garnet. While Morrison was the figurehead and public voice, Garnet appears to have been the main driving force and organiser behind the scenes. The official public launch of the VNPA was at a meeting held in the Lower Melbourne Town Hall on 23 July 1953 – so many people came that 'hundreds' were turned away.

### FRUSTRATION

The next three years were intensely frustrating for Morrison and the VNPA as they sought, through submissions and delegations to the government, to have legislation passed to put national parks on a proper footing. Morrison and Garnet continued tirelessly to push the cause. Finally, in October 1956 the government of Liberal Premier Henry Bolte passed the National Parks Act, and in May 1957 the National Parks Authority was created, with Morrison as its first Director. Morrison resigned as President of VNPA to take up the position.

For a brief period it looked like a great victory, but the cracks soon appeared. The NPA proved, despite Morrison's best efforts, to be weak and flawed in its powers and authority and its finances. All

this took a toll on Morrison, who tragically died suddenly, aged only 58, of a cerebral haemorrhage on 1 March 1958.

Morrison's work was still far from complete, but he will be long remembered and appreciated for what he achieved in a life devoted to the preservation and protection of the environment, and especially our national parks. It is fitting that he has a building named after him at the National Botanic Gardens in Canberra.

### VNPA'S WORK CONTINUES

After Morrison's departure and death the work of the VNPA continued. The weaknesses of the NPA meant that the battle was renewed, both to protect existing parks and to have new ones created, as well as the broader battle to protect Victoria's natural heritage.

Those who wish to learn more about Morrison and the formation of the VNPA can do so in Graham Pizzey's biography *Crosbie Morrison: voice of nature* (Victoria Press 1992), and online at [www.adb.anu.edu.au/biography/morrison-philip-crosbie-11177](http://www.adb.anu.edu.au/biography/morrison-philip-crosbie-11177)

## 1.3 Creation of the VNPA

By then another course had been chosen by the FNCV and other organisations in the Conference – to establish a new permanent body to take over the work of the Conference. It was felt that the Standing Committee and the Conference had taken matters as far as they could and there needed to be a body whose principal role was to continue the fight for legislation and then to be the advocate for national parks once a new system had been established.

A meeting of the Standing Committee in March 1952 proposed the establishment of the new organisation, comprising all organisations and individuals interested in preservation of areas of scenic, historical or scientific interest. The idea was developed further at a meeting of the Standing Committee in July which prepared resolutions to be taken before the next meeting of the Conference that included: 'This Conference resolve itself into a permanent Association to be known as the Victorian National Parks Association'.<sup>29</sup> The resolutions also included a framework Constitution.

When the Conference gathered for its fourth and final meeting on 28 August 1952, Morrison set out the details of the proposal and explained that one of the aspirations was to duplicate a successful arrangement that had been achieved in Queensland:

He spoke of the close liaison of the

official administration of National Parks in Queensland and the Queensland National Parks Association and he hoped that Victoria would develop an Association which could function in a parallel way – in a way that would provide the link between the public and administrative structure that was about to be set up by the Victorian National Parks legislation.<sup>30</sup>

The Conference duly debated, partly amended and then adopted the resolutions and elected a Provisional Council which met on a number of occasions to initiate the organisation and to develop its Constitution and rules.<sup>31</sup> A meeting on 26 November officially formed the Victorian National Parks Association and confirmed the Council - Morrison as President, Garnet as Honorary Secretary (a position he would hold for twenty-one years), Hugh Wilson (Hon. Treasurer), A.W. Burston, E.T. Charlton, Prof J.N. Greenwood, J.M. Harkins, F.P. Hill, Jack Jones, T.E. Kilburn, Fred Lewis, R.T.M. Pescott, N. Richards, E.G. Stewart and (the only woman) Miss M. Wigan.<sup>32</sup>

The objects of the Association were:

- To strive for the welfare of National Parks and for their preservation in perpetuity.
- To foster interest in and appreciation of National Parks.
- To form a link between the public and the Administration in matters concerning National Parks, and to advise, when required, the appropriate authority.
- To make investigations and

representations for further reservations of National Parks.

- To co-operate with persons or organizations having similar objects or interests.

While the VNPA was being set up, in September 1952 there was another change of government that initiated a period of relative stability of nearly three years under Labor led by John Cain senior. Members of this government indicated on a number of occasions that they intended to introduce national parks legislation, but it was also made clear that national parks were not a priority and consequently there was no legislation for the first three years of the VNPA's existence.

Meanwhile the VNPA got on with its work and by the time its first Newsletter was published on 1 July 1953, the Association had about eighty individual members and fifteen Corporate Members - the Bendigo Field Naturalists' Club, Bird Observers' Club, Gould League of Bird Lovers, Field Naturalists' Club of Victoria, Maryborough Field Naturalists' Club, Melbourne Bushwalkers, Melbourne Walking Club, Native Plants Preservation Society of Victoria, National Museum of Victoria Trustees, Portland Field Naturalists' Club, Royal Australasian Ornithologists' Union, Sunraysia Field Naturalists' Club, Victorian Compost Society, Victorian Mountain Tramping Club and the Youth Hostel Association.<sup>33</sup>

*“The public meeting was extraordinarily successful. The attendance was so great that the doors of the hall had to be closed about 7.40 pm and some hundred (including, no doubt, some invited guests) were shut out. About 150 were obliged to stand throughout the evening.*





**Aftermath of the fire that burnt most of Wilsons Promontory in 1951. The tree trunks on the ground may be those of trees killed in an earlier fire.**

Photo: Dr L. H. Smith, Director of National Parks 1958-75

That Newsletter also announced that the VNPA's inaugural public meeting was to be held in the lower hall of the Melbourne Town Hall on 21 July 1953. Behind the scenes, the Council had decided that as the meeting was intended to garner good publicity for the cause, it would be better to overfill a small hall than underfill a large one – hence the lower town hall was chosen rather than the main one. Their aim was

achieved, as Ros Garnet reported to the National Parks Association of Queensland:

The public meeting was extraordinarily successful. The attendance was so great that the doors of the hall had to be closed about 7.40 pm and some hundred (including, no doubt, some invited guests) were shut out. About 150 were obliged to stand throughout the evening.<sup>34</sup>

Those who managed to cram in were treated to films about national parks in Canada and Queensland, and about Wilsons Promontory. The government was represented by Hon C.P. Stoneham, Minister of Agriculture, who promised that new legislation was being prepared.<sup>35</sup> The Age reported the meeting and a few days later published a supportive leading article.<sup>36</sup>

## Biography: J. Ros Garnet and scenery preservation

In December 1958 the VNPA Council discussed what it saw as necessary amendments to the Victorian National Parks Act. One suggestion was to rename the legislation as the National Parks and Scenery Preservation Act. One of the proponents of this idea was J. Ros Garnet, Honorary Secretary and one of the chief architects of the VNPA and its national park policies.

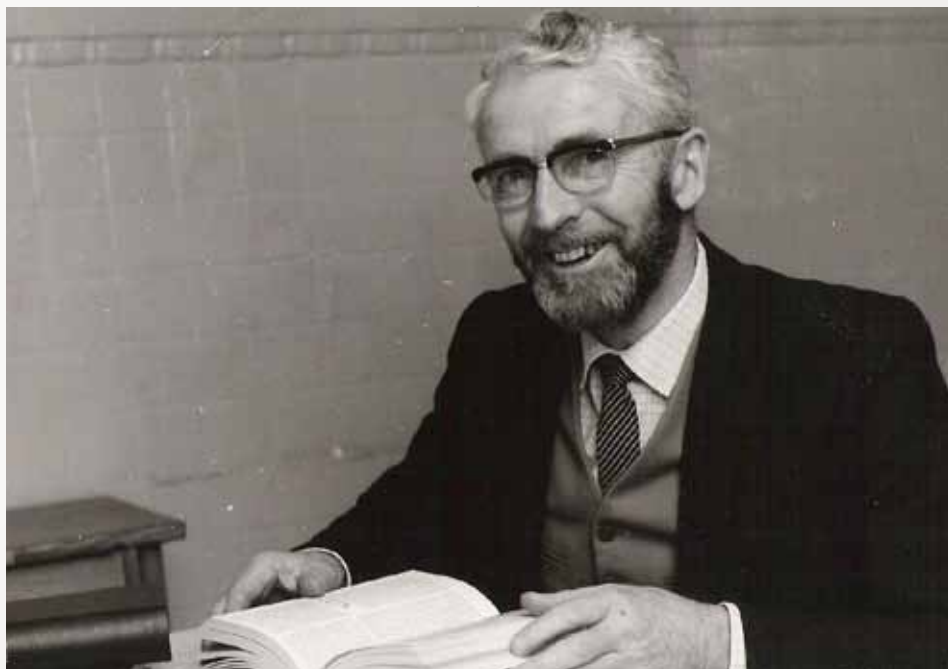
Scenery preservation struck me as a rather strange notion to be advanced in 1958 as a crucial element or justification of national parks, as it was already a fairly dated concept. In the 19th century and the early decades of the 20th the reasons behind nature reservations were essentially anthropocentric – to preserve places for human enjoyment (such as the preservation of grand scenes) and for future human scientific research or other benefits. But by the 1950s educated and aware environmentalists looked beyond human benefits and were at least equally concerned about the 'rights of nature', biodiversity and ecosystem preservation.

So what was going on, and why did Garnet, who seems to have been so acutely aware of such issues, support scenery preservation? Was he really a closet anthropocentrist?

Then I realised that 'scenery preservation' was both a reflection of his love of nature and part of his strategic thinking to protect Victoria's natural heritage. In various writings Garnet referred to the beauty and joy of scenery as part of what he wanted to preserve. At the same time, he was aware that there were benefits to be gained by extending the concept of nature protection beyond national park boundaries. To advance 'scenery preservation' might enable the consideration of adjacent wider areas.

There is an article entitled 'Scenery and Sense' in the VNPA Newsletter no. 22, November 1958, which, while anonymous, I strongly suspect to have been written by Garnet, who was acting as editor at the time. The writer stated:

Our task here is to ensure that the particular attraction—scenery—is preserved, and that any plans for roads, buildings and works (such as clearing or



**J. Ros Garnet, VNPA Secretary, at work in the Commonwealth Serum Laboratories, 1965.**

Photo: courtesy John Garnet

quarrying), is considered by the [National Parks] Authority in the light of the possible spoiling of scenic appeal.

Ros Garnet was a clever man and a most interesting character who, together with Crosbie Morrison, was one of the most important individuals in the foundation and early years of the VNPA. But because Morrison died prematurely in 1958, Garnet's role was longer and more influential.

John Roslyn Garnet (1906-1998) was born at Narracan and spent his early childhood on a small dairy farm in South Gippsland before moving to Melbourne, where he completed his secondary education. In 1922 he began working as a laboratory assistant in Melbourne and subsequently studied at the University of Melbourne where he qualified as an industrial chemist. After a stint with the Commonwealth Department of Health in Port Pirie, South Australia, he returned to Melbourne and worked at the Commonwealth Serum Laboratories as a biochemist until retirement in 1971.

From his early years Garnet loved the Victorian bush, and as a young man he explored much of Victoria, often by

bicycle.

His energy, commitment and determination were amazing, and while he was amiable and charming, he could react strongly and be very forceful when necessary. As fellow VNPA Councillor Tom Kilburn reflected, "Ros would get ideas and concepts and couldn't see why others did not agree on his priorities. He was a bit adamant." Others might have used less gentle terms, and during the height of the Little Desert dispute in early 1970, Premier Henry Bolte struck Garnet's name off a list of the members of a deputation who wished to see him.

The following is a brief summary of the impressive range of activities he undertook.

Ros Garnet was a long-term member of the Field Naturalists Club of Victoria (FNCV) and its Honorary Secretary 1946-47, Vice President 1947-48 and President 1948-49 and 1957-59.

Through the FNCV he became the Secretary of, and a major figure in, the Conference which was established in 1946 and gave birth to the VNPA in 1952. Garnet was Secretary of the FNCV





**Ros Garnet at Suggan Buggan, eastern Victoria, in 1970.**

**Photo: courtesy John Garnet**

Standing Committee on National Parks and National Monuments which did most of the assessment in the late 1940s of existing national park reservations and drafted the guidelines for possible legislation that were submitted to the Conference. It was as these matters were developing that in 1948-49 he first became President of the FNCV.

Garnet became a foundation councillor of the VNPA in 1952 and was its honorary secretary until 1973. He also took on a multitude of other responsibilities over the years, including copious letter writing and lobbying, and assisting in the organisation of meetings and excursions, as well as editing and writing for the Newsletter. He was on the Council until 1977 and was Vice President 1974-77.

As a keen naturalist, with a special interest in indigenous botany (notably orchids), he travelled widely to study flora both within and outside national parks and wrote a small number of books and numerous articles for the Victorian Naturalist, VNPA Newsletter and other journals.

He was particularly interested in Wilsons Promontory and Wyperfeld National Parks, and wrote booklets about their natural and human history – his detailed History of Wilsons Promontory was published by the VNPA in 2009

as a free online download. Among other works, there was a book on the wildflowers of south-eastern Australia.

Over the years, among many organisational roles he was Vice President of the Conservation Council of Victoria and a member of the Native Plants Preservation Society of Victoria, the Royal Society of Victoria, the Society for Growing Australian Plants and the Australian Conservation Foundation. In 1966 he was awarded the Australian Natural History Medallion and in 1982 he was given an Order of Australia (AM) for services to conservation.

Few have done as much for the VNPA, Victorian conservation and 'scenery preservation' as that most committed activist, Ros Garnet.

#### **Biographical Sources:**

W.R. Lane, Foreword in J. Ros Garnet, Spider, Insect and Man, Parkville, Commonwealth Serum Laboratories, 1966.

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Stephen Johnson, 'Profile of a Parks Pioneer', Park Watch, June 1992.

Obituaries: Age, 6 March 1998 (by Malcolm Calder); Park Watch, June 1998 (by Geoff Durham); Park Watch, March 2002 (by Kelvin Thompson)

Biographical notes supplied by Geoff Durham

#### **Some works by J. Ros Garnet:**

Vegetation of Wyperfeld National Park (North-West Victoria): a survey of its vegetation and plant communities, together with a check-list of the vascular flora as at December 1964, FNCV, 1965

Venomous Australian animals dangerous to man, Parkville, Commonwealth Serum Laboratories, 1968

Wildflowers of South-eastern Australia, Melbourne, Nelson, 1974

Wilsons Promontory, Oxford University Press, 1970

The Wildflowers of Wilsons Promontory National Park, Lothian, 1971

A History of Wilsons Promontory, now available on the VNPA website [www.vnpa.org.au](http://www.vnpa.org.au)

[<http://historyofwilsonspromontory.files.wordpress.com/2009/05/a-history-of-wilsons-promontory.pdf>]

'Nature Reserves in Victoria: How much open space can we afford for the protection of scenery and the preservation of nature?', Victorian Naturalist, vol 87, no. 5, May 1970.

## 1.4 The first campaigns – a push for national parks legislation

The VNPA began to develop what would become three of its main areas of regular activity – a pattern that was very similar to those of the FNCV from which it had largely sprung. These were: identifying threats to parks and other areas and seeking to have them protected; the quarterly Newsletter; and excursions to national parks and other places of natural interest. The one aspect of the FNCV that it did not emulate was in holding members lecture nights and meetings – for the first several years the annual general meeting was its only public meeting event. By mid-1956 the Association had thirty corporate members and 469 individual members.

The identification of places under threat and in need of protection would inevitably be, and remains, one of the chief activities and responsibilities of the VNPA, both within and outside national parks. This included the identification of regions which the Association believed should be given national park status or incorporated into an existing park. A good deal of letter writing and lobbying occurred behind the scenes, and the following matters were among those raised by the Council and publicised in the Newsletter in the first three years: protection of the former Coranderk Aboriginal Station at Healesville – and celebration when 340 acres was added to the Colin Mackenzie Sanctuary in 1955; destruction of blue gums on the Lorne foreshore; preventing the You Yangs being taken over by the military for a munitions dump; preserving the Yanakie Common from agricultural development and adding it to Wilsons Promontory NP; trying to stop the spread of 1080 poison in Wyperfeld NP; the start of what would be a very long campaign to establish an Alpine NP; a proposal for a new national park at Mt Richmond; and pleasure when

### NATIONAL PARKS POLICY

#### Preamble

Our Motto is, "For all the People for all Time."  
It is our policy that the National Parks of Victoria should be freely available to the public, consistent with the preservation of the parks and their contents.

#### The First Objective – A National Parks Act

Our immediate objective is to have passed a Victorian National Parks Act, under which will be set up an Authority to administer the National Parks of Victoria.

#### Representation on the Authority

The National Parks Authority, and the Committees appointed for the management of individual parks, should contain representatives of the sections of the public who use the parks for recreation and those interested in the preservation of scenery, flora and fauna, and local history.

The National Parks Authority should contain a public representative of those interested in each of the following – outdoor recreation suitable for a National Park, conservation of flora, conservation of fauna, national historical monuments, and touring.

#### Reservation of National Parks

Land reserved for National Parks should be reserved in such form that it may be added to but may not be revoked nor any portion excised without an Act of Parliament. Areas under consideration as being worthy of permanent reservation as National Parks should be temporarily reserved pending a decision.

#### What should be reserved

National Parks should be sufficient in number and variety to contain selected portions of all types of the landscape, and they should be of sufficient size to ensure that the scenery and flora and fauna of each locality are represented adequately and will be conserved.

#### Purpose of the reservation

The purpose of a National Park should be to maintain the reservation in its natural condition and to conserve wild life, natural features, historic landmarks, and objects of outstanding interest. Should there be

emphasis on a special feature such as the conservation of particular species or the preservation of a historical monument or scientific object, this purpose should be stated in the proclamation of the National Park.

#### Obligation of the Authority

It should be the obligation of the Authority to regulate the public use of National Parks and to conserve the scenery and the natural and historic objects and the indigenous wild life therein and to provide for the enjoyment of the parks in such a manner as will leave them unimpaired for the enjoyment of future generations.

The use of a National Park for any other purpose should be strictly controlled by the Authority to ensure that such use does not interfere with the purposes for which the park was reserved.

In general, roads should be provided to take people to the parks, and for access for fire protection and control purposes. Roads and works should be sited so that they are inconspicuous and in harmony with the surroundings.

#### Education of the Public

The education of the public to preserve National Parks from harm, so that they will continue unchanged for the enjoyment of future generations, should be a duty of the National Parks Authority. The Association will also engage in education and publicity to this end.

#### National Parks Staff

Senior Staff should possess a sound knowledge of conservation and National Park administration.

The staff employed in National Parks should be selected for their suitability and interest in conservation, and training for personnel should be provided. Rangers are necessary, and at least some of the staff should be resident within or close to the park.

#### Finance

Finance for the development and maintenance of National Parks should be a charge on the State and should be adequate.

(From VNPA News Letter, January 1954)

in 1955 the government reserved what would later become the first small section of the Little Desert NP.<sup>37</sup>

In the absence of frequent meetings, the Newsletter was the VNPA's main voice in the world. It indicates that the members were

knowledgeable in their diverse relevant fields, and determined in their aims. The organisation was certainly not insular and there were frequent items on what was happening interstate and overseas, especially in the United States and New Zealand. In January 1954



it published the VNPA policy on national parks<sup>38</sup> (boxed, left).

Excursions and walks have always been a central function of the VNPA, to assist members to experience Victoria's bushland and national parks, but with an overlay of education and social gathering. The first VNPA excursion, very appropriately given its key significance in the birth of the VNPA, was to Wilsons Promontory National Park during the Queen's Birthday weekend in June 1954.<sup>39</sup> The second was organised for the Australia Day weekend in January 1956 to Mount Buller, Mount Stirling and the headwaters of the Delatite River.<sup>40</sup>

Perhaps inevitably, the main focus of the VNPA Council in these first three years under the leadership of Morrison and Garnet was to try to persuade the Cain government to introduce national parks legislation. Morrison continued relentlessly through his broadcasting, speaking, writing and other public activities to push the cause. Garnet was a tireless letter writer and talker who was constantly seeking to raise awareness of the issue and to enlist support.<sup>41</sup> The Cain government, while apparently sympathetic and commencing work on drafting a Bill, struggled for survival in difficult times and national parks did not appear on its legislative agenda. The complexities facing the government appear to have been compounded by disagreement and rivalry between government departments which had responsibilities and power that might be affected – tourism, agriculture, lands and forests. Nevertheless, legislation had apparently been drawn up and was about to be made public when the Labor government was 'split' in 1955 and subsequently lost power. A new Liberal Country Party government, headed by Henry

Bolte, was sworn in during June 1955.

Crosbie Morrison greeted the new government by writing an open letter to Bolte which was published in the Argus on 25 June 1955 and subsequently reprinted in the Newsletter. He set out the reasons and need for national parks and nature protection, and the fact that the two previous governments had prepared legislation. 'This time, what dare we hope? After all, it is not a party question. Perhaps that is the trouble!'<sup>42</sup>

To continue pressure on the government, Ros Garnet and Dewar Goode of the Australian Primary Producers Union organised another conference of interested organisations and government departments in September 1955. A deputation of representatives from the conference met with Bolte in November and were assured that he would draw up legislation to be introduced in the autumn 1956 session of parliament. He requested that the VNPA submit a paper on what it wished to see in the legislation. The Association duly thanked Bolte in its Newsletter and sent him its recommendations.<sup>43</sup>

True to his word, legislation was introduced late in the autumn session in May 1956 by Hon Alexander Fraser, MLA, who guided the legislation through parliament and was and would continue to be a great supporter of the national parks movement. Debate began in September and a number of amendments were made, most of which were felt by the VNPA to have brought improvements.

The Victorian National Parks Act was finally passed on 25 October 1956. It established a National Parks Authority to administer the parks system which would consist of eleven members including a Director, the Premier or his representative who

would be Chairman, representatives from six government departments or authorities (Lands, Forests, Public Works, Soil Conservation, Fisheries & Game and Tourism), two representatives of public organisations concerned with flora & fauna and national parks, and finally the Ski Association of Victoria. (The VNPA expressed surprise at this last inclusion, but it was apparently forced on the government by the Country Party.) Thirteen National Parks were nominated in the legislation – Wyperfeld, Kinglake, Ferntree Gully, Wilsons promontory, Mount Buffalo, The Lakes, Lind Park, Alfred Park, Wingan Inlet, Mallacoota Inlet, Tarra Valley, Bulga Park and Churchill. New national parks could only be established by an Act of Parliament, which made the process more difficult but provided a higher level of protection.<sup>44</sup>

After the years of struggle the initial response from the VNPA was generally one of satisfaction, although there were still reservations and Ros Garnet commented that 'The Act is recognized as an experimental measure, and it remains to be seen how far its administration will be successful'. On the positive side, there was much pleasure that in May 1957 Crosbie Morrison was appointed as the first Director of the National Parks Authority. The Hon. Alexander Fraser, Assistant Minister for Conservation, was appointed Chairman, and another member of the VNPA Council, C.E Isaac, was appointed Deputy Chairman. There were still reservations about such matters as the relationship between the NPA and local management committees, but it was felt that the parks system was in the best of hands, and a significant step forward had been taken for the future of national parks in Victoria.

**>> Footnotes: page 64**

## Wyperfeld

**Approx Area: 72,779ha** Typical Mallee country in the Shires of Dimboola and Karkarook. Reserved in 1909 for the preservation of the characteristic flora and fauna of the region. Approached by road from Rainbow or Hopetown from which its entrance is about 30 miles distant. Permanent water and shelter hut for visitors is available.

## Kinglake

**Approx Area: 5698ha** Forest on the southern slopes of the Plenty Ranges, within the Shires of Whittlesea and Eltham. Approached by road from either Whittlesea or Hurstbridge – about 42 miles from Melbourne. Reserved in 1928 mainly for the preservation of its forest scenery, fern gullies and waterfalls. Contains much of palaeontological interest as well as a good representation of the fauna and flora of the Silurian formation. Camping sites are established at Mason's Falls and Jehosephat Gully while a number of hiking tracks lead to outstanding beauty spots with the Park.

# VICTORIA'S NATIONAL PARKS 1955

Descriptions of the conservation reserves and parks are reproduced and appeared in the VNPA newsletter in 1955.

## Fern Tree Gully

**Approx Area: 324ha** Typifying what once were the magnificent forests and lovely fern gullies of the Dandenong Ranges. Situated on the south-western slopes of the range, little more than 20 miles east by road or rail from Melbourne. First reserved in 1882 it became an exceedingly popular picnic spot during and following the First World War over which period many of its famous fern bowers were despoiled by over-enthusiastic visitors.

## Churchill

**Approx Area: 193ha** North-east corner of what used to be known as the Police Paddock – a large reserve originally used for the agistment of police troopers' mounts. The small section set apart in 1930 as a national park is a timbered portion of the southern slopes of the Lysterfield Hills, about 3 miles from Dandenong.

## Wilsons Promontory

**Approx Area: 41,440ha** Rugged granite mountains in the southernmost part of the State, situated in the Shire of South Gippsland and approached via the Yanakie isthmus. First reservation gazetted in 1898 as a centre for the preservation of flora and fauna. Notable for its magnificent coastal scenery and frequented as a very popular holiday resort. Self-service cottages and good camping facilities available.



## Mount Buffalo

**Approx Area: 11,137ha** Rugged, granite, sub-alpine plateau in the Shire of Bright. First reservation of 5 square miles made in 1898. Approached by road from Myrtleford, Porepunkah or Bright. Notable for its snow field attractions in winter and for its profusion of alpine wildflowers, bird life and bracing climate in summer. The Government Chalet caters for tourists in all seasons and camping is permitted in specified area.

## Lind

**Approx Area: 1165ha** East Gippsland rain forest with attendant rank fern gullies. Reserved in 1926. Situated in the Shire of Orbost between the township of Orbost and Cann River to the east. The Prince's Highway traverses the Park through the lovely Euchre Creek Valley.

## Alfred Peak

**Approx Area: 2072ha** Sub-tropical rain forest centred on the Mount Drummer jungle through which passes the Prince's Highway. Is in the Shire of Orbost and several miles east of Cann River. Reserved in 1925 and is notable for its containing the Gippsland Waratah (*Telopea oreoides*), some very rare ferns and two of the State's five species of epiphytic orchid.

## Mallacoota Inlet

**Approx Area: 4462ha** Land bordering the Inlet. Situated in the Shire of Orbost. Reserved in 1909. It is the State's most easterly national park, notable for the entrancing inlet seascapes and, incidentally, the wildlife of the forests bordering the inlet. Hotel and camping ground are outside the boundaries of the Park. Approached from Genoa on the Prince's Highway. There is a hope that the contiguous Howe Ranges will be added to the park to provide one of Victoria's conservation areas for rich concentration of sub-tropical vegetation which occurs in the region.

## Wingan Inlet

**Approx Area: 1843ha** A little more than 7 square miles of land bordering Wingan Inlet on the southern coast of far east Victoria. Reserved in 1909 for its natural features of inlet scenery and forested coastal vegetation. Is inaccessible, except by boat, unless one is prepared to push through miles of trackless bush. To botanists it is notable as being the only known habitat in Victoria of the shrubby, Larch-leaved Trigger Plant (*Stylidium laricifolium*) until recently known only from New South Wales.

## Lakes National Park (Sperm Whale Head)

**Approx Area: 1843ha** Sand dune country on the Sperm Whale peninsula between Lake Victoria and Lake Reeve. Included a number of adjacent small islands. Although in the Shire of Rosedale is easily accessible only by boat from Paynesville in the Shire of Bairnsdale. Reserved in 1927 for the preservation of flora and fauna. It is the only known habitat of the plant *Thryptomene miqueliana* and the western limit of the Mahogany Gum (*Eucalyptus botrioides*). There are no facilities for tourists or visitors.

## Bulga Park

**Approx Area: 37ha** Reserved in 1904 to preserve another remarkable fern gully and the associated rain-forest vegetation. The main gully is crossed by a long picturesque suspension bridge. This park also, is entered from the Grand Ridge Road two miles north of Tarra Valley at Balook, 1,900 feet above sea level. Both parks are little gems of nature and, for their preservation intact need to be increased in size to protect them from the hazards which could beset them were the adjacent forests cleared.

## Tarra Valley

**Approx Area: 81ha** Reserved in 1909 to preserve the rain-forest vegetation which, in times gone by, characterized most of the valleys of the Strzelecki Ranges. Within 18 miles of Yarram, it is entered from the Grand Ridge Road.

# CHAPTER 2: THE DIFFICULT YEARS – 1957-72

## 2.1 Conflicting ideologies in the 1960s

In 1957 the future of Victoria's national parks looked promising. An eleven-member National Parks Authority had been appointed with Philip Crosbie Morrison as Director of National Parks, and there was a legislative structure for better protection and administration of existing parks and the nomination of new ones.

However, disappointment and disillusion soon set in as it became obvious that the legislation was flawed and weak, the National Parks Authority was not very effective and the expected protection and expansion of the parks system was something of a chimera. Under these circumstances the honeymoon period with Henry Bolte and his government soon deteriorated, and in following years relations were at times quite tense.

The 1960s is a fascinating period. We all know its image as the decade of challenge to conventional values, the Vietnam war and protests, free love and the pill. It was also a decade of prosperity, consumerism and development and, largely as a result, it was a major turning point in environmental degradation but also in environmental awareness. The environment emerged as a political and conscience issue as never before.

The Little Desert campaign of 1969-70 (over the proposed subdivision of previously uncleared land for farming in western Victoria) is often seen as one of the most significant starting points for the environmental movement in Victoria and even Australia. However, a close study of the VNPA in the 1960s indicates that the Little Desert issue was really a culmination of a decade of mounting dissatisfaction and tension with the Bolte government, not the beginning.

As the sixties advanced it was clear that despite their role in putting the state's national parks on a somewhat better footing, Bolte and his ministers had few further environmental aspirations. As a conservative farmer with a utilitarian view of the land and economic development, Bolte had a limited understanding of environmental science or philosophy – although in this it should be recognised that he very much reflected the mainstream of his time.

In many respects it is not surprising that Victoria's landmark environmental dispute over the Little Desert was during his government. Alexander Fraser, who had been so supportive in obtaining national parks legislation, became Minister for State Development with responsibility for national parks, but he and his successor (Vance Dickie) manifested limited support for park protection or expansion. It is notable that this combination of ministerial responsibility for 'state development' and national parks was indicative of the mindset in the government.

Bolte's understandings and attitudes were summed up in an article purportedly written by him, entitled 'The Government's Attitude Towards Conservation', and published in March 1968 in Victoria's Resources, the journal of the Natural Resources Conservation League (NRCL). In his eyes conservation was essentially about the wise use of 'natural resources' for human use, rather than because of any intrinsic ecological value. So the article was about such matters as the work of the Soil Conservation Authority, building more dams (water conservation), 'game management' and 'conservation and tourism'. On the last subject his anthropocentrism was explicit:

*The raw materials of tourism are*

*the scenic and cultural features and the wildlife of the country. These constitute the basic attractions that the tourist industry has to sell, and from which it draws its life blood. So the preservation of this raw material is vital to the development of tourism.*

*The loss of any single natural, historical or scientific attraction is a serious blow, not only to the tourist industry but to the people of the state as a whole.<sup>1</sup>*

That is where he saw the role of national parks – 'as very important reserves for the conservation of our natural resources: they provide protection for native plants and animals whilst encouraging people to seek enjoyment in natural surroundings.'<sup>2</sup> He went on to proclaim the achievements of the 1956 Act and subsequent expansion of Victoria's parks. While few in the environmental movement would have agreed with such boasts, they would have very much endorsed two uncharacteristically insightful sentences:

*We believe that all must be made to realise that we are simply tenants using, but conserving, our resources in trust for those who follow after us.*

*My government believes that the quality of the environment must be looked upon as a basic human right just as much as food, clothing and housing.<sup>3</sup>*

In practice, Bolte and his ministers soon ran out of steam on the idea of nature protection and they were no great fans of extending the reserve and national park system, especially when it involved potentially 'productive' land. Their prime aspiration was for economic development and growth economics.

The public, meanwhile, was increasingly exposed to ideas of the vulnerability of natural ecosystems



and the damage that human 'development' was doing. From America there came a stream of environmentally conscious literature. Pre-eminent was Rachel Carson's *Silent Spring* in 1962 which identified the repercussions of using pesticides, notably DDT, and has been seen as the most influential book in the twentieth century.<sup>4</sup> It certainly helped people to understand the connectedness of nature and the dangers of intervening in ecosystems. In fact, at a VNPA Council meeting on 30 May 1963 one of the councillors drew the book to the attention of fellow members.<sup>5</sup>

There were also many Australian texts published in these years, including three major works in 1966 – Jock Marshall's superbly titled *The Great Extermination: a Guide to Anglo-Australian Cupidity Wickedness and Waste*<sup>6</sup> (the VNPA Council sent Marshall a congratulatory letter<sup>7</sup>), Vincent Serventy's *A Continent in Danger*<sup>8</sup> and Alan Moorhead's *The Fatal Impact*<sup>9</sup>. In 1968 Geoff Moseley published a guide to Australian national parks<sup>10</sup>, in 1969 Eric Rolls published *They All Ran Wild* (his pioneering account of invasive species) and in that same year Len Webb teamed with Derek Whitelock and John Le Gay Brereton to produce *The Last of Lands: conservation in Australia*.<sup>11</sup> These men were among our most prominent environmentalists. As their concerns and those of an increasing number of scientists and environmentalists became more widely known, so did the demand for greater recognition and action from politicians.

All told, while there was mounting public sympathy with its cause, the VNPA had a difficult decade as it sought to protect and expand the national park system.



Rudd Campbell was the sole ranger at Wyperfeld National Park from 1958 until his death in 1970.

## 2.2 The VNPA and the National Parks Authority

Crosbie Morrison resigned as President of the VNPA when he was appointed Director of National Parks in 1957 and was replaced by Hugh Wilson, who had been a foundation councillor, treasurer and the editor of the Newsletter.

The challenge facing Morrison at the National Parks Authority (NPA) was probably greater than he had anticipated.

While it seemed that there had been a great victory in persuading Bolte to set up a better national parks system with its own Authority, the cracks soon appeared. The NPA proved, despite Morrison's best efforts, to be weak and flawed. It was very poorly funded and Morrison took a severe cut in salary to take on the position. The legislation did not require existing management committees to surrender their independence and come under the auspices of the NPA. Some did not – notably the Mount Buffalo committee<sup>12</sup> – and they continued to resist efforts to improve their operations in such matters as using grazing leases as a source of revenue. There was little in the way of pest control or fire protection.

It had been expected when the 1956 legislation was passed that it would be followed by the establishment of a formal National Parks Service with a Head Ranger to supervise ranger staff. Morrison expected to be able to do this, but



**The cleared ski slopes at Cresta, Mt Buffalo NP in the early 1960s.**

again he ran into resistance from local committees of management and with lack of funds, and there was no professional ranger service for a number of years.<sup>13</sup>

There were also reservations among environmentalists about the membership of the Authority, particularly its numerical dominance by senior public servants with an interest in promoting and defending the interests of their own departments. The Lands Department, for example, was believed to be opposed to further significant areas being declared national parks, and the Forests Commission of Victoria was not often willing to see potential timber coupes being removed from the swathe

of timber industry chainsaws.<sup>14</sup> Although there was minor community representation on the NPA it did not include the VNPA, so when in 1959 the government proposed to add a representative of the Country Women's Association the VNPA was far from impressed.<sup>15</sup>

Much of Morrison's time in the early months was spent battling these obstacles, inspecting existing and possible parks, planning and publicising. The strain on him was considerable, especially once he was diagnosed with high blood pressure. Tragically, he died suddenly, aged only 58, of a cerebral haemorrhage in March 1958.<sup>16</sup> There was great sorrow across the Victorian community at his death and he is still

*“Much of Morrison's time in the early months was spent battling these obstacles, inspecting existing and possible parks, planning and publicising. The strain on him was considerable, especially once he was diagnosed with high blood pressure.”*





**Winter at Mt Buffalo's Cresta ski fields, early 1960s.**

remembered and appreciated for what he achieved in a life devoted to the preservation and protection of the environment, and especially our national parks. Fittingly, among the memorials in his honour is a building at the National Botanic Gardens in Canberra that is named after him.

Morrison was succeeded as Director by Dr L.H. Smith with whom VNPA would have a mixed relationship. Smith faced similar problems to Morrison running a poorly financed organisation with a small staff, although over time the budget was increased and the parks service came under control of the NPA and was professionalised. Nevertheless, he was in a somewhat invidious position in the 1960s. He

was caught on one side between a largely unsympathetic government and Authority members who represented their departmental interests first, and on the other side the VNPA and other environmental organisations. At times, the environmentalists saw Smith as inadequately resisting inappropriate government policies.

Substantially because of its limited resources and confused role, the NPA did very little to evaluate new regions in the state to become protected areas. Another government body, the Land Utilization Advisory Council (LUAC) had been established in 1950 to offer advice to government on the use and allocation of Victorian Land, but it

similarly achieved very little, at least partly when it became the venue for interdepartmental disputes over land use.<sup>17</sup>

By the late 1960s the VNPA was openly advocating the need to restructure the NPA and for clearer assessment principles and allocation of Crown land.<sup>18</sup>

## 2.3 The work of the VNPA

Most likely due to mounting community awareness of environmental matters and concern about the actions of the Bolte government, membership of the VNPA doubled from 610 ordinary and 31 corporate members in 1959 to 1370 members and 58 corporates at the end of the Little Desert campaign in August 1970.<sup>19</sup> The Presidents in that period were Hugh Wilson (1957-63), Ray Specht (1963-64), David Lahey (1965-66), J.H. Quirk (1966-67) and Gwynneth Taylor (1968-71).

The Committee members undertook an immense amount of voluntary work with no paid staff to assist them. Administration was substantially undertaken by Ros Garnet, who used his Pascoe Vale home as the VNPA office, although he was apparently able to get some of the secretarial work undertaken by staff in his office at the Commonwealth Serum Laboratories. For Committee members, besides the normal monthly meetings there were various sub-committees, park inspections, documents to be read and written, people to meet and lobby, etc, etc. Some must have spent extraordinary hours travelling to and from the suburbs to meetings, often by train or tram as not all had cars. Travel was often late at night as meetings generally started at about 8pm and ran late – sometimes after midnight if there was a particular crisis or issue.

A good deal of detailed VNPA work was undertaken by sub-committees. In 1963, for example, sub-committees were responsible for Membership, Excursions, Finance, and for individual campaigns for new parks in the Yarra Valley and the Alps, the inclusion of the Kulkynne into Hattah Lakes National Park, and a Master Plan committee for the development of a statewide land



**The southern coastline of Wilsons Promontory hides a series of rugged indentations and precipitous headlands that still attract tourists today.**

usage scheme (of which see more below).<sup>20</sup>

As this indicates, one of the main concerns of the VNPA was campaigning for the creation of new parks and the extension of existing ones. The main new areas that were worked for included the Alpine, Brisbane Ranges, Lower Glenelg, Little Desert, Otways, Grampians and Yarra Valley, while the principal extension campaigns involved Wilsons Promontory, Mallacoota Inlet and the Kulkynne. However, prior to 1969 all this effort produced few results, with only minor extensions and six new parks: Fraser (1957), Hattah Lakes (1960), Mt Richmond (1960), Mt Eccles (1960), Glenaladale (1963) and Port Campbell (1964). Of these, only Hattah Lakes was of a substantial size, but even so it was far smaller than desired as it did not include the Kulkynne area. As Hugh Wilson wrote

in the Newsletter in August 1962, the 'Government has not fulfilled the expectations it raised when the [1956] Act was passed.'<sup>21</sup>

In September 1969, when a number of new parks were on the cards, Ros Garnet pointed to the small total area that had been brought into the Victorian parks system. Most of the 375,000 acres in existing parks had been dedicated between 1898 and 1928. There were only two substantial parks in the state, Wyperfeld and Wilsons Promontory, and only two significant parks had been created by the current government - Fraser and Hattah Lakes. Even the proposals that the government was looking at in 1969 were far smaller than had been proposed, and meanwhile areas that the VNPA had been advocating as parks for many years were deteriorating from commercial development and other exploitation.<sup>22</sup>



As early as 1960 Hugh Wilson had concluded that as there was little progress in the care of existing parks or the declaration of new ones, the VNPA would again have to shoulder the burden of providing leadership in the community and acting as a needle in the side of government and the NPA. In March 1960 it organised a major conference on new parks and the management of existing ones. The conference demanded great stamina from participants, running from 10.00 am to 10.00 pm, with an excursion to Churchill National Park on the following day. Presentations included:

- Principles in Selecting New National Parks, by Hugh Wilson
- Victoria's need for a Representative System of National Parks and Nature Reserves, by Jack Jones
- Kulkyn National Park Request, by Jack Jones and Hugh Wilson
- Alpine National Park Proposal, by W. Rege Mann
- Proposal for a National Park in the Little Desert by Keith Hateley
- A National Park Service, by Ros Garnet<sup>23</sup>

A long list of motions was passed and sent to the government, but with no result.<sup>24</sup> As the subjects of the presentations indicate, an increasing focus of the VNPA was the need to develop a range of parks that was representative of the state's ecological systems, and particularly of its vegetation communities.<sup>25</sup> This matter was discussed over a number of years, but there was little progress as the government and the NPA lacked the drive and/or resources to undertake the necessary preliminary detailed scientific survey of public lands.

Finally, the VNPA decided that it would have to do the work itself, or at least undertake the first stage of evaluating existing national parks



**John Hart-Smith, son of Dr L. H. Smith, Director of National Parks 1958-75, looks down on the Wilsons Promontory lighthouse in 1951. Built by contract labour in the 1850s, the lighthouse was the site of a radar station in World War II and is still an important navigational facility.**

and other conservation reserves. The main initial driving force was academic biologist Ray Specht when he was President in 1963-64. Known at first as the Master Plan, the survey was rebadged as a 'study of nature conservation in Victoria'. In 1965 a fund-raising campaign promoted by

David Lahey raised sufficient to start the work.

With invaluable assistance and guidance from Professor John Turner, who from 1959 was a VNPA Council member, the VNPA in 1965 employed a young biologist, Judith Frankenberg, to do the

work. She was a science graduate from Melbourne University with distinctions in botany and zoology, and a member of the VNPA and FNCV. It proved to be a long and drawn out process for her to undertake the survey and then for Turner to edit it. *Nature Conservation*

*in Victoria: a survey* was finally published in late 1971.<sup>26</sup> By then there had been a major change in government administration, and a new authority, the Land Conservation Council (LCC), had been established to evaluate and advise on the use of Victorian public lands (see below).

The VNPA publication gave the LCC an excellent base from which to work.<sup>27</sup>

Inevitably, most of the work of the VNPA was more routine. It continued the publication of its quarterly Newsletter, and from March 1964 began holding regular speaker meetings for members. Fittingly, the first presentation was by Ros Garnet.<sup>28</sup> The annual excursions became so popular that in the later 1960s they were increased in frequency. Most were to existing parks or to proposed ones (Brisbane Ranges, Kulkyne, Little Desert).

A great deal of energy was devoted to what can best be described as trying to put out the 'spot fires' that broke out frequently and threatened to degrade both existing and aspiring parks. The Mallacoota national park was a constant source of attention because the VNPA wished to see it extended to the NSW border. However, sawmillers and the local Shire were opposed. In 1964 the local Shire even applied to the NPA to excise thousands of acres from the National Park (in exchange for other areas) to enable the town to expand. When the NPA was slow to reject the notion, one VNPA member described it as 'supine'.<sup>29</sup> An even greater challenge in East Gippsland was the emergence of the woodchipping industry in the late 1960s.<sup>30</sup>

The proposed alpine national park also had its local opponents, particularly mountain cattlemen and timber millers. However, an equal threat came from the increasing popularity of snow skiing and the need to provide roads to access the developing ski fields.<sup>31</sup>

One of the most interesting dilemmas facing the VNPA involved the Sporting Shooters Association (SSA). In 1967 the SSA sought



Tidal River beach has long been a favourite for visitors to Wilsons Prom.



and, after a long discussion by the Council, was granted corporate membership. Not surprisingly, some VNPA members questioned the acceptance of a group that shot animals, and at the 1967 annual general meeting there was a move to revoke SSA membership. After a fiery discussion the motion was defeated.

But in coming months it became clear that the SSA had an agenda to use VNPA membership to gain access to protected areas. Proclaiming themselves true environmentalists because they shot introduced feral animals such as deer and foxes, the SSA sought to have the Yanakie area adjacent to Wilsons Promontory National Park declared a game reserve where they could hunt. The VNPA membership was deeply divided between those who were profoundly opposed to any association with shooters and to having a game reserve on the border of a national park, and those who saw some benefits in the removal of feral animals. Following discussions with the SSA, at the next annual general meeting in 1968 there was a heated discussion after which a large majority voted to expel the SSA.<sup>32</sup>

However, the biggest 'bushfires' the VNPA had to deal with, more than just spot fires, involved government support for the encroachment of commercial enterprises into the parks.



**Looking across Norman Bay towards Wilsons Promontory's Mt Oberon. Pillar Point, the headland which the people are standing on, was proposed as the site for a large 'chalet' in the early 1960s.**



## 2.4 Commercialisation of national parks

One of the most difficult issues for the VNPA in its relationship with the government was the question of commercial activities in national parks. At the heart of the matter was the range of different conceptualisations of the role and purpose of national parks. At one extreme were the environmentalists who preferred, if not to 'lock out' most people and human activity, at least to keep them tightly controlled and minimal. At the other were those who saw national parks as little more than temporary reservations and recreational areas that could and should change and adapt to meet the needs of free enterprise, tourism, development and community recreation. The VNPA had many of the former among its members, and the government, Country Party, business, tourism and rural communities had many of the latter. These differences continue, and pressures to commercialise or change the protection of parks have continued to re-emerge every few years.

One of the first challenges was grazing leases which, as mentioned above, did not immediately disappear with the formation of the NPA because some independent local committees still used grazing as a source of revenue. However, over time and despite some local resistance from graziers, the practice was removed from most parks. Nevertheless, grazing in national parks continued to have its advocates – as it still does.<sup>33</sup>

More serious was the question of the provision of recreational facilities and accommodation in parks. While camping was deemed acceptable, and even permanent cabins and a shop/café at Tidal River in Wilsons Promontory, upmarket accommodation and restaurants were seen by the VNPA as essentially

inappropriate. That brought them into frequent conflict with the Bolte government – and created a crisis in the VNPA. In 1960 the government passed an amendment to the national parks legislation that empowered the NPA to lease parts of parks for unspecified purposes for up to up to 33 years, or for 75 years if lessees erected a building worth more than 100,000 pounds (\$200,000). Underlying the plans, it seems, was pressure from the tourism industry to provide more upmarket accommodation and dining facilities, and soon after the legislation was passed plans were announced for these at Mount Buffalo and Wilsons Promontory.

The VNPA had opposed the legislation, and in a briefing paper Hugh Wilson set out the reasons:

*National parks are for all the people all the time. We do not want privileged individuals with holiday homes on leased land in national parks, or privileged to have leases for other purposes not essential to providing facilities for all the public to enjoy the natural condition of the park. As nearly all the parks are small in extent, provision of accommodation, motels and caravan parks should be outside the parks rather than in them.*<sup>34</sup>

Nevertheless, the VNPA seems to have done relatively little to try to prevent the initial development of a restaurant, some accommodation and other tourist facilities at Mount Buffalo. The NPA played a role in initiating the developments, of which Sir Rupert Clarke was the principal shareholder, and the Tatra Inn was opened in August 1964 with relatively little fuss. However, the VNPA was subsequently highly critical of the environmental damage and visual scar that resulted.<sup>35</sup>

What created an even greater

response from the VNPA was the periodic revival over the next eight years of a proposal to create a recreational lake near the Inn, and in 1971 to undertake a major expansion of the premises to include motel accommodation. The VNPA fought these all the way, and finally in 1972, after Bolte had retired, the Hamer government announced through Conservation Minister Bill Borthwick that it would not to allow the dam or further development, and in 1975 the lease was bought back.<sup>36</sup>

But it was the Wilsons Promontory proposal that elicited more immediate opposition from the VNPA and caused more problems for the organisation. This was partly because the defence of 'the Prom' had been so significant in the foundation of the VNPA, and its ongoing protection was dear to the heart of VNPA members, none more than Ros Garnet. However, the scale of the Wilsons Promontory development was horrifying – although the VNPA was probably not fully aware of the extent as the details do not appear to have been made public. The developer initially planned to take over 350 acres of the park for a very large international standard 'chalet', a motel and a convention centre, with liquor licence, providing accommodation for 600 guests and 200 staff, with accompanying car parks and other facilities, including a golf course and clubhouse. There could even be a mini-railway to take tourists around the coast. The NPA made it clear that such plans were unrealistic, and the proposals were subsequently scaled down and the site changed, but a long fight ensued.<sup>37</sup>

The VNPA was opposed in principle to commercialisation, but there was a necessary sensitivity about how best to deal with the government. Bolte and Fraser had



**Tatra Inn under construction at Mount Buffalo NP, early 1960s.**

been responsible for the new national parks regime and, while they were showing less interest in protection and more in development, the VNPA still needed to work with them. As a result, in the early 1960s the VNPA carefully expressed opposition to the motel because of its 'luxurious' nature and where it was to be sited. At its September 1962 meeting the Council passed three motions, the first opposing the hotel/motel development, the second opposing in principle any leases to private enterprise and the third seeking to rescind the legislation allowing long-term leases.<sup>38</sup>

The matter came to a head in October 1962 when the government announced, with the (possibly reluctant) support of the NPA, that a 33-year lease had been granted for a motel at Bishop Rock overlooking Leonard Bay. What made it even more problematic for conservationists was that the plans included a licensed restaurant.<sup>39</sup>

Ros Garnet was particularly

disturbed by these developments and campaigned against them. In early November he issued a press statement condemning the plan which was picked up by the Age and Herald. He asserted that 'The National Parks Authority and the State Government were out of touch with public opinion in allowing a licensed motel to be built at Wilson's Promontory'.<sup>40</sup>

Hugh Wilson, the then President, was outraged that Garnet had taken it on himself to issue such a statement criticising the government and wrote immediately to Bolte to apologise: 'Mr Garnet feels strongly about this matter, but he had no authority to speak for the Association'. He also wrote to Garnet, reprimanding him. In turn, Garnet was outraged by Wilson's actions, and a serious crisis followed. Put simply, when efforts at reconciliation failed it was recommended that both men take leave for a year. Garnet agreed, but Wilson refused to vacate his position as President

and remained in the chair until the AGM in September 1963 when he left the VNPA. Biologist Dr Ray Specht then became President and Garnet returned as Honorary Secretary.<sup>41</sup>

There was no immediate construction of the proposed Wilsons Promontory development, at least partly because of public opposition, and while the plans periodically re-emerged they were eventually dropped in the 1970s.<sup>42</sup>

## 2.5 Little Desert

The culmination of the deteriorating relationship with the Bolte government was the Little Desert dispute of 1969–70. The details of the dispute are discussed in another chapter, but in essence it arose from the decision by the government in 1968, pushed by Lands Minister Sir William McDonald, to clear and sell for farming most of the so-called Little Desert region in western Victoria. The VNPA and other groups had been campaigning since the late 1950s to have all or part of the Little Desert declared a national park, but there had also been various proposals to develop it for farming. The development schemes had lapsed for financial reasons or because of opposition, but this time the government, particularly McDonald, was determined to push ahead. The 1968 Little Desert proposal coincided with plans to develop much of the Kentbruck Heath area in south-west Victoria for farms and pine plantations. This was another region that VNPA and other conservationists had been campaigning for years to have reserved as a Lower Glenelg National Park.

A strong community backlash was ignited against these plans in which the VNPA and its members played a significant role, notably VNPA President Gwynneth Taylor. She was one of the founders and prominent members of the Save Our Bushland Action Committee (SOBAC) which carried the fight up to the government and enlisted substantial community support. When Bolte saw the political winds changing against him he backed away from the scheme in late 1969 and early 1970.<sup>43</sup>

The Little Desert dispute had several important repercussions, including the stimulation of a much

broader public awareness of and involvement in conservation and environmental matters. From the VNPA perspective there were three specific results.

First, the nature of the dispute resulted in an initiative in mid-1969 by G.T. Thompson, President of the NRCL, to create another permanent umbrella conservation body from the existing organisations to promote environmental causes. To a degree, this was a repeat of the moves that had resulted in the formation of the VNPA in 1952, but the new body would have a much broader remit than national parks. As the Newsletter remarked ironically, ‘... it is safe to say that conservationists, largely through the efforts of the Minister of Lands, have been welded into a very unified team whose spokesman from now on – in matters of State-wide concern – will be the Conservation Council of Victoria.’<sup>44</sup> In the changed political circumstances following the Little Desert campaign, the CCV would receive government support and would be involved in high-level consultations on environmental matters. Ros Garnet was a long-term VNPA representative on the CCV (and for a period its Vice President) and won some notoriety and plaudits in early 1970 when Bolte refused to accept a deputation from the CCV if it included him – he struck Garnet’s name off the list of deputation members.<sup>45</sup> The CCV was renamed Environment Victoria in 1995.

The second major repercussion was the commencement of political transformation in Victorian politics, including the retirement of Bolte in 1972. In December 1969 four new national parks were suddenly declared – Morwell, Little Desert (to mollify public protests 87,000 acres were hived off from development

plans), Lower Glenelg and Captain James Cook. Some 17,500 acres of land at Yanakie were also added to Wilsons Promontory NP. The strength of the public protest movement was also credited with having a major influence on a by-election in the seat of Dandenong in December 1969 in which there was a landslide from Bolte’s governing Liberals to the Labor opposition.

How much the election result was a response to the Little Desert issue, and how much Bolte’s subsequent transformation resulted from the loss of the by-election, it is impossible to say. Nevertheless, a marked transformation came over his attitudes (less confrontational) and policies (more environmentally friendly) prior to the general election of May 1970. The environmental policies were influenced by Cabinet Ministers Bill Borthwick and Dick Hamer, and in his election speech Bolte even declared an intention to increase Victoria’s proportion of land held in conservation reserves to 5 per cent compared with the then total of about 1 per cent. Bolte was returned to office but Sir William McDonald lost his seat and Borthwick became the new Minister for Lands and Conservation. During 1970 and 1971 a number of new initiatives were enacted, including the establishment of the Environment Protection Authority and major changes in the evaluation of land use in Victoria and in the administration of the national parks system.<sup>46</sup>

These legislative and administrative environmental reforms are the third major Little Desert repercussion. Legislation in December 1970 abolished the National Parks Authority and passed administration of the parks system to the Minister for State Development, who had a new Division responsible





**The Little Desert National Park provides important protection for the endangered Malleefowl.** Photo: Sue Hayman-Fox

for national parks within the Department under the control of a Director of National Parks (initially L.H. Smith). Under this arrangement a more professional National Parks Service was developed during the 1970s. The VNPA would have preferred that the administrative authority was a Commission, not a government department. However, a National Parks Advisory Committee was created which included VNPA representation.

Responsibility for evaluating 'balanced' land usage needs and advising government on future classification of Victorian public lands was handed to a new authority, the Land Conservation Council, which was established by the Land Conservation Act in 1970. Its role was to investigate and evaluate Victoria's public land and to recommend future 'balanced' use to government. The LCC also included representatives from community groups, including the CCV.<sup>47</sup>

The 1960s had proved to be far more disappointing for the VNPA than its members had expected when the 1956 National Parks Act had been passed. There had been minimal progress in the assessment of Victoria's public

lands and in the development of the state's national parks. One of the principal factors had been the personal views of Henry Bolte, but he was complemented in this by the prevalence of similar attitudes and understandings among his own party, and by the even more reactionary stances among Country Party members and electors upon whom Bolte was partly dependent.

However, a gradual change in public attitudes in the 1960s, especially among the more environmentally-minded urban middle class, was brought to a head over the Little Desert dispute. The resulting political shock waves led to a much more progressive period in the 1970s – at least for a few years.

**>> Footnotes: page 64**

All photos in this chapter except for the Malleefowl were taken by Dr Len Smith, Director of National Parks 1958-75, and provided courtesy of John Hart-Smith and Helen Kosky



# VICTORIA'S NATIONAL PARKS

# 1972



Parks established up to 1957



Parks established 1957-1972





# CHAPTER 3: HIGHS & LOWS – 1972-82

## 3.1 The VNPA and the Land Conservation Council

It is very noticeable that over the last sixty years the VNPA, and the environmental movement more generally, have experienced a number of phases of high points and low points. For a short period all will seem promising and environmental protection will rise to the top of a wave, but this will soon be followed by a decline into another deep trough of resistance and opposition before slowly rising again.

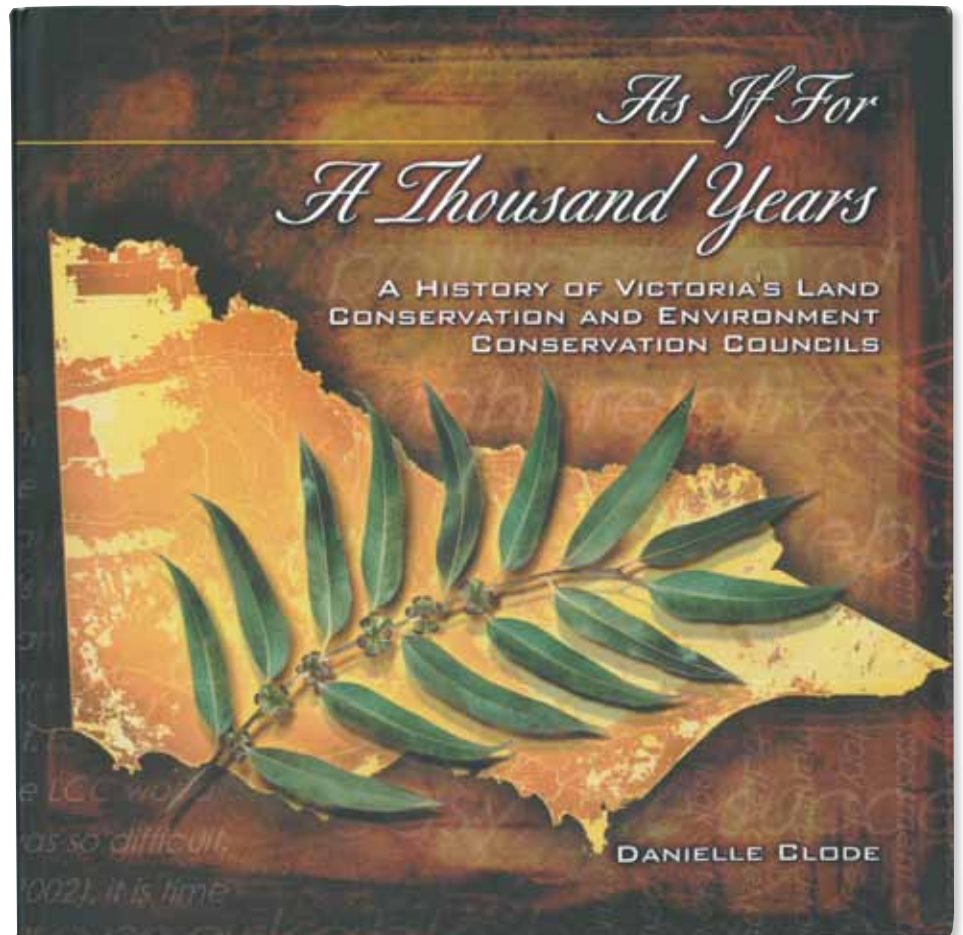
For the VNPA the 1970s and then the 1980s were very much a period of such undulations.

There were two main factors in this. The first was fluctuations in the environmental friendliness in the policies of government. The second, arguably even more potent, was responses to the activities and recommendations of the Land Conservation Council (LCC), which had been established in 1970.

While criticism of the LCC was (and is) sometimes made, it nevertheless offered an optimistic and measured process of evaluation of the future use of remaining Crown Land in Victoria. Its role was to make recommendations for those areas that should be protected or could be used for other purposes such as forestry, agriculture and tourism facilities.

The LCC began by dividing the State into a number of regions or Study Areas and started to work methodically through them, wisely commencing with some of the relatively less problematic or controversial ones, such as the far south-west.

For each Study Area there was a reasonably lengthy and complex process which commenced with a scientific study by an expert group. This was followed by a phase of public consultations and the publication of initial LCC



**Published in 2006, this book is a comprehensive account of the formation and work of the Land Conservation Council.**

recommendations. Another period of public consultation and submissions preceded the publication of final recommendations, which were required to be tabled in parliament.

It was a system that had been consciously designed to offer independence and freedom from political influence. Sam Dimmick, the Chair of the LCC, was a strong and independent force for conservation until he died in 1984.<sup>1</sup>

The LCC process was one that enabled the VNPA to be deeply involved and to have some influence – indeed one could argue that the LCC somewhat depended upon the

expertise and input of the VNPA and other environmental groups. Through the sheer hard work of its members the Association prepared detailed initial submissions and subsequent responses, and fought hard to have its views heard by the public, LCC and governments.

The actual results of the process during parts of the period were, however, disappointing for environmentalists. In its early years the LCC generally worked well but, like the National Parks Authority before it, most of its members were drawn from government departments and authorities and therefore, despite

expectations of independence, often saw themselves primarily as representatives of the interests of those departments and authorities. Some of them, notably the Forests Commission of Victoria, fought relentlessly to hold on to as much as they could of their responsibilities and power and sought to limit the growth of national parks. At times these internal divisions frustrated quick decision-making.

However, the LCC also had a small community representation, and two of those who served on it were men closely involved with the VNPA. In the early years Professor John Turner was one of the community members, and later Dr Malcolm Calder brought his botanical expertise to the deliberations for many years.

A second source of frustration and delay was that even when LCC recommendations were finalised and tabled in parliament, governments generally moved slowly to enact the declaration of new protected areas. There were statutory requirements for governments to respond, but politics often came to the fore. Governments could not be required to endorse or proceed with implementing the recommendations of the LCC and so the list of unimplemented recommendations steadily lengthened. The VNPA called upon Premier Hamer to 'Make it Happen' as his motto promised, despite the resistance of 'farmers, sawmillers, dune-buggy organisations' and other interest groups.<sup>2</sup>

In 1972 the small Organ Pipes National Park was established on privately donated land, but it was not until 1975 that a new National Parks Act finally established any more protected areas. These included Brisbane Ranges National Park and some 'lower-level' parks, among which were Cape Schanck Coastal

Park and Warrandyte State Park.<sup>3</sup>

The 1975 Act proved to be a landmark piece of legislation, though less for its impact on national parks and more for the much wider range of types of protected public lands and spaces that it facilitated. With this Act behind it, the LCC developed a tendency to recommend a wide range of levels of protection, and over time the number of new categories grew steadily to include Reference Area, Wilderness Area, National Park, State Park, Regional Park, Flora and Fauna Reserve, Natural Features and Scenic Reserve, Bushland Reserve and State Forest. In due course, there would be about forty categories, which potentially caused more confusion than clarification.<sup>4</sup> Definitions, classifications and levels of protection were subject to a good deal of debate among VNPA members, but there was strong support for the concept of Reference and Wilderness areas with their higher levels of protection and human exclusion.<sup>5</sup>

The VNPA seldom received all it wanted from the LCC, but that was inevitable in a process that sought balance through compromise. Balance and compromise, however, were very undesirable concepts for those who saw the speed with which environmental degradation was gathering pace across Victoria.

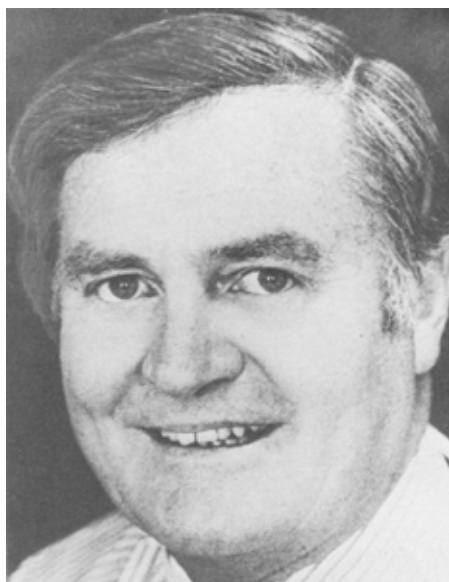
The VNPA adapted to, and was somewhat transformed by, this new environment and, combined with the passing of its first generation of enthusiasts, evolved into a very different organisation.

## 3.2 Aspirations – the early 1970s

For the VNPA the first half of the '70s was a high point of expectation, if not always of fulfilment. The reforms introduced in the last two years of Henry Bolte's government after the Little Desert dispute were subsequently endorsed and even furthered by the government of Premier Dick Hamer and his Minister for Conservation, Bill Borthwick. They were in power throughout the decade, and brought a generally more sympathetic approach to environmental issues – or they did so as far as the pro-development and anti-conservation elements in the Liberal Party and National Party would allow them.

Other reforms were also promising. The new National Parks Service (NPS) was better funded and more successful and professional than the previous National Parks Authority in the development and care of declared national parks. Dr Len Smith was Director until his retirement in 1975, when he was followed by John Brookes.<sup>6</sup> The NPS also had the assistance of a National Parks Advisory Committee (NPAC), re-formed in 1975 as the National Parks Advisory Council, which included a number of community and expert members. The VNPA was able to nominate members through the Conservation Council of Victoria (CCV). Dr Malcolm Calder, Budge Bleakley and Geoff Durham were each members for several years.

Somewhat paradoxically, the Victorian environmental cause was stimulated at the start of the decade by the unsuccessful campaign in Tasmania to save Lake Pedder from flooding. Like the Little Desert campaign before it, the threatened loss stimulated public awareness of broader environmental matters and the flooding of Lake Pedder in 1972 sounded a widely-heard alarm.



**Bill Borthwick, Minister for Conservation in Rupert Hamer's Liberal Government, was largely responsible for setting up the Land Conservation Council.**

*Photo from The Alps at the Crossroads*

Other transformations in the political landscape followed the federal election at the end of 1972 which was won by the Labor Party led by Gough Whitlam. Whitlam introduced a period of almost frantic reforms, including in environmental heritage policy. A Committee of Inquiry into the National Estate was appointed, headed by Justice Robert Hope. Malcolm Calder, Ros Garnet, Eric Quinlan and John Turner appeared before the commission for the VNPA, and there was also a written submission.<sup>7</sup> The Hope recommendations resulted in major reforms in Australian heritage protection, including the establishment of the Australian Heritage Commission in 1975.

In 1974 the federal Minister for the Environment and Conservation, Moss Cass, established National Estate grants to assist environmental organizations. One of these went

to the Australian Conservation Foundation for the establishment of a Victorian Environment Centre, which was initially set up in Drummond Street, Carlton. The offices were occupied by a number of environmental groups including the VNPA and the Conservation Council of Victoria (CCV).<sup>8</sup> This address was not long-lived and there would be many moves of the VNPA office before finally settling in the 60L Green Building in Leicester Street, Carlton, in 2002.

The timing of the establishment of the Environment Centre was fortuitous for the VNPA. Ros Garnet stood down in 1973 after 21 years as Honorary Secretary. Until then the organisation had operated largely from his Pascoe Vale home and his office at the Commonwealth Serum Laboratories.<sup>9</sup> Finding someone to take over all the things that Garnet had done proved nearly impossible. Until this time the VNPA had been entirely run by volunteers, but at about the same time as the office was established the VNPA was awarded state and Commonwealth grants to enable it to employ staff,<sup>10</sup> which changed the nature of the organisation from its earlier 'amateur' model.

In September 1974 the VNPA appointed an Executive Officer, Dr John Jenkin, but when he resigned in July 1976 it was decided instead to employ an Office Manager, Eileen McKee, who was already working in the office. She became not only the chief administrator for the next decade but was a major force and organiser in the VNPA. She served as editor of *Park Watch* and in the mid-1980s was a member of Council. Her service and contribution were invaluable, providing both control and continuity.<sup>11</sup>

The reduced day-to-day



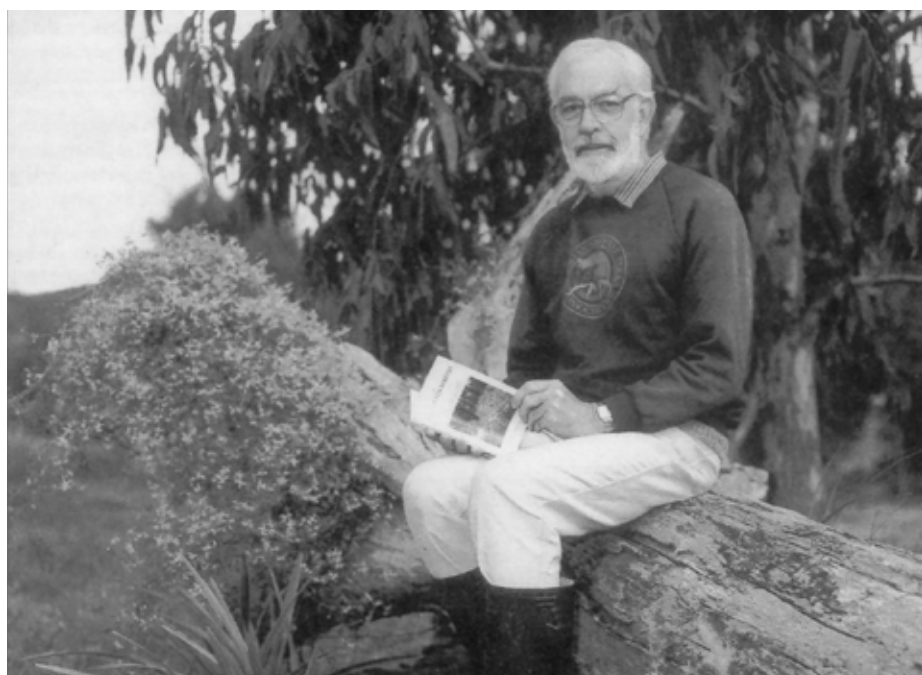


**Dr Len Smith, Director of National Parks 1958-75, in Sherbrooke Forest. He was an authority on lyrebirds.**

**Photo: Dr Len Smith**

administrative responsibilities somewhat freed the Council to concentrate on the LCC process, policy issues and responding to threats. To undertake these tasks it was fortunate to have a series of influential and hard-working leaders, including:

- Professor John Turner, a VNPA nominee to the CCV and through that a member of the LCC 1971-78.<sup>12</sup>
- Dr Malcolm Calder, University of Melbourne botanist and colleague of John Turner, President 1971-74 and 1975-77. He was active on the CCV and through that he served on the LCC 1983-94.
- H.R. (Budge) Bleakley, President 1974-75 and 1977-78, a leading figure in many conservation organisations including SOBAC, CCV and the National Parks Advisory Committee (NPAC).<sup>13</sup>
- Eric Quinlan, a councillor for 33 years who served in several capacities including Honorary Secretary and Newsletter editor. He was a major force in the Alpine campaign, excursion organiser and promoter of roadside conservation. He was also unusual in that he was a committed Christian who believed that it is a Christian duty to care for the planet and its creatures.<sup>14</sup>



**Dr Malcolm Calder, VNPA President 1971-74 and 1975-77.**

**Photo: James Calder, Park Watch September 1994**

- Jean Blackburn, a long-term councillor and Treasurer from 1959-83 as well as a major figure in the Melbourne Women's Walking Club. She was a conservative treasurer whose careful and wise control of the finances was one of the reasons that the VNPA survived and at times even prospered.<sup>15</sup>
- W.R. (Rege) Mann, a long-term councillor and Vice President for many years.
- Geoff Durham, a solicitor, brought legal skills and an immense commitment to the VNPA over many years in such areas as bushwalking, Friends groups and the administration of national parks.



He was President in the difficult and tense years of 1978-81.

Finances and membership were perennial issues, as they are for most voluntary environmental and heritage organisations. Membership fluctuated but essentially plateaued at about 2000, with individual and family memberships becoming rather more significant than corporate members. However, subscriptions did not provide an adequate income for the organisation to employ the staff it needed or to undertake its many activities and demands. Other sources of income were required.

There was some success in obtaining government grants for general administration and for special purposes such as research studies to assist with LCC submissions. A small income was brought in by publications and the annual calendar, sold partly through a small bookshop

in the office. The VNPA was very fortunate to have the services of David Tatnall, a highly skilled nature photographer whose images graced its calendars and enlivened its newsletters for many years.<sup>16</sup> He also edited *Park Watch* for a number of years.

Newsletters played a critical role in the public face of the VNPA and a great deal of effort and finance was invested in them. Over time they became larger, better illustrated and more glossy, and eventually coloured. In 1975 the title was changed from *Newsletter* to *Journal*, and in 1978 to *Park Watch*.

Regular activities were mounted to keep members involved and to encourage new ones. There were general meetings with speakers to bring everyone up-to-date with campaigns and with what was happening in existing parks. The

excursions of the previous decade evolved into organised bushwalks, which were becoming one of the main activities and attractions of the VNPA. By 1978 there were about twenty walks per annum.<sup>17</sup>

An offshoot of the work of the VNPA in the 1970s and 1980s was the establishment of a number of Friends groups for some of the national parks and other protected areas across the state. The first group was formed to rehabilitate previously private land which, when it was proclaimed as Organ Pipes National Park in 1972, was badly weed infested. Jack Lyale (the park's first Caretaker/Ranger) and Don Marsh (a volunteer who had previously formed the Maribyrnong Valley Committee) built a group of volunteers (Friends of the Organ Pipes) to help them with weed control and revegetation. The Park was transformed.<sup>18</sup> This success was noted, other Friends groups were established and, on becoming Director of National Parks in 1979, Don Saunders was instrumental in the establishment of many more. Geoff Durham was the major force within the VNPA in the development of the Friends groups, both while he was President and subsequently as VNPA Coordinator of Activities. Their objectives were:

1. To provide support and foster public awareness of the park.
2. To assist the National Parks Service with special projects.
3. To bring into contact people with a mutual interest in the park.

There was some initial resistance from rangers who saw the volunteers as intruding on their jobs, but overall the Friends made such a valuable contribution that they were (and are) welcomed and valued. For those who wish to see the work of one Friends group, an excellent video is now available – Wyperfeld 100: A traverse



Keen bushwalker Jean Blackburn, third from left in this photo, was VNPA Treasurer 1959-83. The photo, from *From Uphill After Lunch: the Melbourne Women's Walking Club 1922-1985*, shows walkers leaving Bindaree Hut, New Year 1939. Jean was president of MWWC in 1956 and 1957.





**Don Marsh at the site of the Organ Pipes NP car park in 1972. The Friends group, which helped restore the park's indigenous vegetation, is still active today.**

in time, produced by the Friends of Wyperfeld.

The VNPA frequently looked beyond national parks to broader environmental issues, such as intensively promoting the care and protection of remnant vegetation in roadside reservations<sup>19</sup> and opposing logging in water catchment areas.<sup>20</sup> Beyond Victoria the VNPA took an interest in events and threats occurring interstate and worldwide. The Association expressed alarm at the flooding of Lake Pedder<sup>21</sup> in Tasmania and sand mining on Fraser Island in Queensland, and also supported the emergence of awards of World Heritage status to areas of particular natural history significance. In 1975 VNPA was a founding member of the Australian National Parks Council, an umbrella group for the state national parks associations. Ros Garnet was the first representative from Victoria.<sup>22</sup>

Despite the lessons that should have been learned in the Little Desert dispute, there were continued rumblings of outright opposition to the designation of more areas of the state for national parks, and such voices became louder and more

strident from the second half of the 1970s. The timber industry worked partly through the Hoo-Hoo Club, a mysterious and secretive American-style men's club for people in the Victorian Sawmillers Association and the FCV. Its role was to promote and lobby for timber industry interests.<sup>23</sup>

Besides the various commercially-interested groups, there was also opposition from recreational users of the bush. The increasing use of off-road vehicles caused obvious environmental damage, but this seems only to have fed the demand by some groups to gain full access to parks. In the sparring over such matters, in 1973 the Land Rover Club objected to an item in the Newsletter that described owners and drivers of 4WD vehicles as 'mechanised morons'.<sup>24</sup> In 1975 the Journal featured the threat from off-road vehicles in two editions. In the first it reprinted an article from Off-Road Australia that argued that as most parts of national parks could not be seen without a long walk, they should be opened up to 4WDs - 'The National Parks have been "preserved" long enough, it's time to begin enjoying them.'<sup>25</sup> The next edition

had a special feature, 'Motorised Madness or Valid Recreation?', with a front cover photograph of young boys on trailbikes.<sup>26</sup> Strangely, in 1975 the Land Rover Owners' Club of Australia (Victorian Branch) became a corporate member of the VNPA.<sup>27</sup> However, they had no impact and soon dropped out.

Nevertheless, mounting community resistance to environmental groups and to the creation of more national parks would mark the coming decade.

### 3.3 Challenges and Issues 1975-1982

From about the mid-1970s the earlier optimism and faith in change under the Hamer government gradually ebbed away as progress in establishing new parks remained slow, and as fresh challenges to the environment arose.

For the VNPA there were five main and somewhat overlapping challenges and issues. Most important was the Alpine campaign which is dealt with in the next section. The others were East Gippsland, the Otways, the Grampians and woodchipping. At the centre of each of these was the Forests Commission of Victoria (FCV) which had under its control large areas of remaining Victorian public land – including most of the areas that the VNPA believed should become national parks. The FCV resisted most encroachment on its territory, and as its Chairman from 1969 to 1978, Dr Frank Moulds, represented the FCV on the LCC until 1977, its voice was heard loud and clear.

The role of the FCV was essentially to ‘manage’ Victoria’s forests. Until the middle of the 20th century that term was essentially defined as implementing wise-use conservation so that forests would be available in perpetuity as a timber ‘resource’. As a concession, some areas might be retained un-logged to represent native forests in their ‘pristine’ state, but this was not perceived as the main purpose of forests or the FCV. As foresters, employees of the FCV had a reputation for believing that they knew the forests best, and knew what was best for the forests. Indeed, it is clear that many foresters saw themselves as true conservationists because they promised to ensure the longevity of regrowth forests for long-term sustainable supply to the timber industry.

In the changing environmental

circumstances and philosophies of the post-WWII era, however, the term ‘conservation’ came to mean protection of ecosystems rather than conserving ‘resources’ for human utility, as it had previously. Under these circumstances such forester attitudes were increasingly outdated, and Moulds and the FCV became deeply unpopular with environmentalists. One gains the impression that the foresters were somewhat mystified by this, and Moulds appears to have been quite hurt by the criticism levelled at him and the FCV by the VNPA and other environmentalists.

However, Moulds went far beyond mere advocacy of forest interests and in 1977 attacked La Trobe University staff and the ABC for publicising research on Cinnamon Fungus in Victorian forests, and effectively called upon the university to dismiss or discipline the staff. He was also clearly a close reader of VNPA publications and responded quite angrily and defensively to any criticism of the FCV and its policies and practices.<sup>28</sup> Woodchipping of native forests was a particular bone of contention.<sup>29</sup>

Geoff Durham remembers another example of the gap in understanding between VNPA and foresters. When the Grampians National Park was about to be declared and handed over by the FCV to the control of the National Parks Service, it was found that many of the trees in popular areas had been ringbarked. The foresters explained that they had done this prior to the handover as good silvicultural practice, since thinning forests enabled survivors to grow straighter and more quickly. The ringbarking seems to have been done in good faith, not as an act of sabotage of natural processes or as revenge against environmentalists.<sup>30</sup>

Woodchipping, of which the FCV was a strong promoter, emerged as a serious threat to Victoria’s forests in the 1970s. In 1967 NSW introduced woodchipping in its southern forests, not far across the border from East Gippsland, and during the 1970s there were recurring proposals and mounting pressure to chip Victoria’s forests as well. The export of chipped timber for paper production was an attractive proposition to the timber industry as it ostensibly added value by using the waste that would otherwise be left on the forest floor or burned after logging. However, in practice over the years, vast areas of good timber trees, sawlogs and areas with high ecological values were clearfelled for chipping. Clearfelling was favoured by some foresters as it provided the opportunity to clear the forest of ‘rubbish’ and start afresh with a new crop of strong and healthy trees. But for environmentalists, clearfelling represented loss of habitat and an attack upon biodiversity by promoting a monocultural eucalypt forest.

There was also strong support in the timber and forestry lobbies for the notion that they could further value-add by converting chips in a local pulp mill ready for paper production. On one level this was a sensible idea, but pulp mills are large, heavily polluting enterprises that need to devour vast quantities of timber to be viable, and therefore represented an even greater environmental threat. A small mill had operated at Maryvale in the La Trobe Valley by Australian Paper Mills since the 1930s, and it provided a salutary lesson about the timber and energy consumption and pollution capacity of paper mills. Nevertheless, in the 1970s there were various proposals to establish much larger pulp mills in Victoria, notably at Orbost. These proposals were staunchly resisted by the VNPA and





### The Grampians in the 1970s. Grampians NP was established in 1984.

other environmentalists.<sup>31</sup>

Potentially any remaining forests in Victoria could be opened up to the chipper for export or for pulp. The areas most under threat were East Gippsland and the Otway Ranges.

Relatively small amounts were chipped and carried interstate for processing in the 1970s. A pilot scheme commenced in East Gippsland in 1975 but Premier Hamer put a stop to it in the following year. However, the threats continued, and in 1976 two big companies proposed large-scale exports and there was increasing discussion of the establishment of pulp mills in East Gippsland. The VNPA Journal described this as 'Victoria's Forests - Down to the Sea as Chips'. These proposals were not favoured by the Hamer government, but some 'waste' was sent from East Gippsland to Eden in NSW, and at the other end of the state from the Otways to Mount Gambier for processing. The VNPA's position was not to resist the use of residues, but it staunchly opposed the use of standing trees, the establishment of mills which would create chemical waste, and the export of woodchips or pulp.

In 1980-82 large-scale proposals for woodchipping and a pulpmill re-emerged. During 1981 the Japanese company Harris-Daishowa, which ran the Eden scheme, applied for a licence to export woodchips from Victoria, and the FCV commissioned an Environmental Effects Study which was widely seen to be token and biased. Even before the EES was released, however, the Liberal government, now led by Lindsay Thompson, announced the start of a pilot woodchipping export scheme. Hamer had recently retired, and under Thompson more pro-development forces had taken control in the Liberal government and there was little apparent interest in environmental protection.<sup>33</sup> The conservation movement and parts of the Victorian community were alienated and enraged, as Park Watch illustrated:

*This scheme joins a growing list of destructive projects being supported by the morally bankrupt Government of Victoria, as part of its 'new directions' policies, such as an export woodchip scheme in the Otways, logging in the so-called 'national parks' in the Alps and the Grampians, not to mention the annihilation of some 20 000 ha of peppermint forests in the North-East over the next 20 years, to make way for pine plantations.*<sup>34</sup>

When the EES was released, it was described by the VNPA as 'distorted' and 'misleading'.<sup>35</sup> Woodchipping in East Gippsland would be one of the key issues in the 1982 election campaign.

Saving what was left of the Otway forests was also a source of great concern for the VNPA, since the region was recognised as ecologically and strategically ideal for a national park. Standing in the way was the FCV, which managed the area as a State Forest and wished to continue permanent logging, including for woodchipping. There was also an alarming expansion of clearing native forests for pine plantations to feed paper production.

In the second half of the 1970s the LCC scheduled work on the Corangamite Study Area, which included the Otways, and its preliminary recommendations in early 1978 were 'blasted' by the VNPA and described as 'a disaster'. The LCC recommended declaration of only a small area for an Otway National Park, and even within the park it supported ongoing logging to 1988.<sup>36</sup> Park Watch commented:

*There appears to be a complete*





**Croajingolong NP protects Victoria's 'Wilderness Coast'.**

**Photo: Courtesy Parks Victoria**

*violation of basic conservation principles, and one can only assume that the L.C.C. has been unable to decide if timber or nature conservation interests are more important – unlike Solomon, Council has lowered the sword in an abortive attempt to satisfy both.<sup>37</sup>*

Nevertheless, the recommendation was essentially adopted, and the first 12,750 ha of the later much larger Otway National Park was legislated for in 1981. Logging in this first stage ended in 1985.<sup>38</sup>

The situation was similar in the Grampians, one of Victoria's most magnificent natural regions, but one where the FCV also held sway and fought attempts within and outside the LCC to limit any national park and to maintain logging and grazing. There were, of course, very real concerns for local communities in the loss of jobs if a national park was declared and the timber industry was curtailed or closed. However, the VNPA was able to point out that the timber industry was already on the decline as most of the best and readily accessible timber had been logged, and that the tourist employment benefits in the region had the potential to outweigh timber job losses.

The matter came to a head at the end of the 1970s and in the early 1980s as the South-Western 2 Study Area, which included Grampians, passed through the LCC processes. It was believed in the VNPA that FCV employees were actively opposing a national park by spreading rumours that it would lead to weed infestation, bushfires and other problems. The local traders were even told that it was intended that the NPS would take over control of Halls Gap.<sup>39</sup> Because of these pressures, in 1979 the LCC discussed the possibility of recommending that the FCV be given ongoing control over a proposed national park. The idea did not go down well with the VNPA and other environmentalists and was later abandoned. Nevertheless, while the LCC was still considering its recommendations in 1981, four Liberal Party members of parliament publicly opposed a Grampians National Park and advocated ongoing FCV control.<sup>40</sup>

The initial LCC recommendations in 1981 received a mixed reaction from the VNPA. While it was proposed that there should be a substantial national park of 108,000 ha under NPS control, the park was a strange patchwork of

relatively inaccessible areas made up of lower grade timber that would be protected, and interspersed with the best stands of commercial timber that were to be excluded and retained for logging. Among other problems, as the VNPA pointed out, this meant that the park would protect only a distorted representation of Grampians ecosystems. There was to be a State Park enclosed within the National Park boundaries that would be under FCV control, but 'most terrible of all and totally unforgiveable', it was recommended that there should be ongoing logging within the National Park. The VNPA held a public protest meeting<sup>41</sup> and there was such a strong community response that there was little further progress while the LCC and the Liberal government considered their positions.<sup>42</sup>

East Gippsland also emerged in the late 1970s and early 1980s as a major source of concern for the VNPA, and in some respects it is the main region in Victoria that has yet to be satisfactorily resolved. This large forested region was covered with majestic stands of trees interspersed with fern-filled wet gullies. Until demand and technology made it feasible to log the region in the 1960s

it had been substantially intact. The timber industry, facilitated by the FCV, gradually expanded its activities in East Gippsland, and there was much discussion about issuing licences to allow the export of woodchips. The drawn-out LCC process caused some anxiety but its initial decisions were generally found to be 'pleasing' by the VNPA. The coastal region was made more secure by the creation of Croajingolong National park in 1979, bringing together and extending the existing Mallacoota Inlet, Wingan Inlet and Captain James Cook national parks. However, the 1980s would see ongoing conflict over the future of the large East Gippsland hinterland forests, notably including the Errinundra Plateau and Rodger River regions, and from the threat of woodchipping.<sup>43</sup>

As the creation of Croajingolong NP illustrates, despite difficulties and delays there was some progress in the achievement of both new parks and the extension of old ones in the late 1970s and early 1980s. Most notably, to celebrate the centenary of Australia's first national park on 26 April 1879 - the Royal National Park near Sydney - the Victorian government established four new national parks, sixteen 'other' parks and some extensions to existing parks. The new national parks were Baw Baw, Croajingolong and two small parks in the Alpine region (Snowy River and Tingaringy). Also in 1979 Brisbane Ranges National Park was extended, 43,500 ha were added to Wyperfeld NP, and the first Victorian Wilderness Area was established with the declaration of the 113,500 ha Big Desert Wilderness Park. This last area was almost immediately added to the Register of the National Estate.

In 1980 the long-sought extension of Hattah Lakes National Park was achieved with the addition of the Kulkynne State Forest to form Hattah-

Kulkynne National Park. It is interesting to note how much easier and less controversial these Wimmera and Mallee parks were to achieve, especially after the Little Desert controversy, as they did not have large stands of usable timber and their land was considered much less valuable for exploitation.

In 1981 the first small part of the Otway National Park was legislated for, together with three more relatively small national parks in the Alpine area – Bogong, Wonnangatta-Moroka and Cobberas-Tingaringy (see below).<sup>44</sup>

As these terrestrial victories were achieved, the VNPA began to look towards other aspects of the environment and new issues. One that emerged in the second half of the 1970s was an awareness that there was little or no coastal or marine protection in the state. At first, attention was mainly directed to the care of coastal land regions from the pressures of development and pollution, but in due course the vision extended equally out to sea and began the long process of working towards the declaration of marine national parks and other protected zones.<sup>45</sup>

The main focus of attention in the second half of the 1970s, however, was the alpine region in Victoria's north-east.

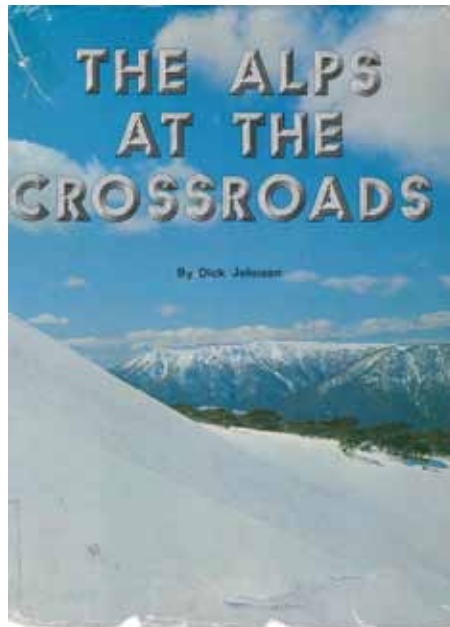
## 3.4 The Alpine Campaign – Part 1

Since the foundation of the VNPA there had been two areas of the state that appear to have been particularly dear to the hearts of Association members. The first was Wilsons Promontory which, since it was already a national park, generally needed little more than the hosing down of externally-imposed problems and keeping a watchful eye on conditions there. After the attempt to build a hotel/motel in the 1960s, the Prom was generally quiet in the 1970s and 1980s – apart from growing numbers of visitors. Nevertheless, problems periodically arose, such as in 1973 when the Committee of Management prevented the destruction of rabbits because ‘the public like to see rabbits here’.<sup>46</sup>

A much greater challenge was to fulfil an ambition towards which the VNPA had aspired since its foundation - the establishment of a large alpine national park stretching from the region east of Mount Baw Baw to the NSW border, and therefore contiguous with the NSW Kosciuszko National Park. However, more than any other region the Alps campaign was subject to dispiriting delays and opposition. There was a hope of success as early as 1959, but a Bill was abandoned because of opposition from the Country Party.<sup>47</sup>

VNPA anxiety over the future of the Alps mounted in the 1970s as recreational use and commercial exploitation increased and degradation escalated. For example, community affluence facilitated greater popularity of snow skiing, which in turn led to more areas being turned over for ski villages and ski runs, and more areas being accessed by newly-carved roads.<sup>48</sup>

Work on the North-East Study Zone, which included the alpine region, began in 1973. Already there was a formidable range of



interests vociferously resisting the establishment of a large alpine park. At the forefront were the FCV and the timber industry which, together with many rural residents and regional councils, were fearful of any reduction of timber cutting and its effects on employment and timber communities. Beside them were mountain cattlemen who for decades had grazed their cattle (and previously sheep) in mountain pastures over summer. Cattlemen numbers and economic importance were small, but they were an immensely effective lobby group through their appeal to heritage and tradition. Concerns about being ‘locked out’ of areas or having activities curbed were also voiced by off-road vehicle owners and clubs, the ski and tourism industry and the gun lobby.

The politics were complex. Bill Borthwick was a strong sympathiser with environmental groups and was widely admired by them. However, both he and Hamer had to operate within a political reality in which a large proportion of the Liberal Party were more aligned to the pro-

development ethos of the Bolte era than to empathy for protected areas. The Liberals were also in competition with the Country/National Party for the rural vote, and in rural areas there was a strong and increasingly vehement anti-environment sentiment.

In a vain effort to mollify the threatening conflict over the Alps, in 1973 Hamer set up a special committee, the North-East Alpine Areas Working Group, to work through the various demands and arrive at a compromise which could be provided to the LCC.<sup>49</sup> It was reconvened in 1976 and made fresh recommendations, but it did little to mollify the sparring groups.<sup>50</sup>

While these early moves were taking place, the VNPA made its own outstanding contribution to the campaign and to public awareness of the issues by commissioning Dick Johnson to write a book on the Alps. Johnson, a metallurgist who worked with BHP, had been deeply involved in the Lake Pedder campaign and had written a book on it. A VNPA Councillor since 1970 (and in the 1980s would serve as President, Secretary, Editor and Treasurer), Johnson had a profound interest in the Alps issue. The book was financed largely by the VNPA but with financial and research assistance from the Federation of Victorian Walking Clubs (FVWC) and Save Our Bushlands Action Committee (SOBAC).<sup>51</sup> Johnson was assisted by a team of VNPA people including Sandra Bardwell, Geoff Edwards and Ann and Lindsay Crawford.

The Alps at the Crossroads was published in 1974, and launched by Bill Borthwick.<sup>52</sup> Johnson was a man of strong opinions and assertions, and not all of the VNPA councillors felt comfortable with the strength of some of the opinions he expressed in the book, but all would have agreed that



it was an impressive achievement. It began with an outline of the international wilderness movement, placing Australian environmentalists within that context, and went on to describe the exploitation of Australian land since European settlement and the twentieth century campaign for Victorian national parks.

Johnson analysed the impact of each of the interest groups that in the 1970s were pressing for continued alpine access and were resisting an alpine national park – miners, foresters, timber cutters, graziers, skiers and off-road vehicle owners. It was a hard-hitting and compelling polemic which sold quickly – 10,000 in the first few weeks and with a number of reprints which took its total sales to 23,000. VNPA councillors, staff, members and anyone who could help was recruited to distribute it to newsagents, bookshops, etc. The profits were used to fund future publications.<sup>53</sup>

The number of sales is indicative of the influence of the book in informing the public and spreading awareness of the importance of the Alps. Predictably, the publication was not without controversy, and Johnson and the VNPA came under sustained criticism over many years for their promotion of the alpine park.<sup>54</sup> Dr L.H. Smith, previously the Director of the National Parks Authority (NPA) and then Director of the National Parks Service until retirement in 1974, bridled at some of the book's unfavourable references to him and the NPA. Strangely, he left it until 1983 to make an issue of the comments and to be mollified.<sup>55</sup>

Meanwhile the VNPA continued its campaign, encouraging Victorians to 'Elp Save an Alp!'. In 1974 the Association received a Technical Assistance Grant from Australian Department of Environment &



**Cypress-pines in Cobberas-Tingaringy NP.**

**Photo: VNPA**

Conservation to investigate the proposed alpine park region. Nine university graduates were employed to undertake what was arguably the most extensive research study of the area to that time.<sup>56</sup>

There was mounting community tension in north-eastern Victoria and in 1976 the VNPA decided to send a delegation of councillors to meet with residents of Omeo, Heyfield and Bright. The Executive considered it necessary to impress 'on Council the fact that the audience in these towns

is likely to be HOSTILE and ANGRY.'<sup>57</sup>

After an attenuated process, the LCC presented its first recommendations in mid-1978. At the core was a proposal to divide the Alps into eight zones, with responsibility for management of the zones allocated to a number government authorities, but notably to the FCV. Over these there would be a new authority, the Alpine Reserve Council. Less than 20% of the area would be in a protected zone and there would be no significant new national parks.<sup>58</sup>

The idea satisfied no-one and there began four years of bitter conflict between environmentalists and those opposed to them, and between the various interest groups. The VNPA must have known that bad news was coming from the LCC as it began to plan a protest meeting about the 'Alpine National Farce' several weeks in advance of the announcement of the recommendations. Symbolically it chose the lower hall of the Melbourne Town Hall in recognition of the hall having been used for the VNPA's foundation meeting in 1952. As then, the crowd was so large that not everyone could gain entry.<sup>59</sup>

Because of its ongoing campaign, the VNPA came under heavy fire from those who wanted to use the Alps for other purposes. VNPA members were abused as selfish, city scum and communists, and had their position misrepresented. Several new anti-environment groups were established to work alongside existing bodies, at least one of which asked the Commonwealth for a grant equal to that of the Australian Conservation Foundation so that it could fight against parks and protected areas. Indeed, the fact that government financial support was given to environmental groups to do their work caused deep resentment among many anti-environmentalists.

Among the key terms in the lexicon of such groups were 'multiple use' and 'balanced use', which in reality were code for opening land to all uses and exploitation. These groups brought a Professor Mellanby from Britain to argue for the adoption of a model of national parks for Australia similar to the one used in Britain. There, traditional villages, farms and other human and economic activities took place within national park boundaries. It was argued that under the principle of 'multiple use', such a model could be adopted in Australia.

The very different human histories and states of the environments were not considered relevant.<sup>60</sup>

Bruce Evans, the National Party MLA for Gippsland East, was particularly vociferous in his opposition to environmentalism and environmentalists, and among his many attacks moved a motion in parliament that control of national parks be handed to the FCV.<sup>61</sup>

In the months after the initial LCC recommendations were published the VNPA set to work to prepare its response, which it submitted later in 1978.<sup>62</sup> There then began a long and tense period of campaigning and sparring with opposition groups until the LCC final recommendations were handed down in the second half of 1979. These were an improvement on the previous recommendations, dropping the proposed Alpine Reserve Council and recommending four small new national parks in the east and Alps - Wonnangatta-Moroka, Bogong, Cobberas-Tingaringy and Snowy River. There was also to be an Avon 'Wilderness' and other lesser extensions and creations.

However, grazing, mining and hunting were to be allowed to continue in many areas, and others were to be logged before they were declared part of a protected area or national park. The latter seems a very strange proposition but it was considered a necessary concession in order to get sufficient political support. It was reluctantly accepted by the VNPA. Overall, the VNPA was 'extremely disappointed' and Dick Johnson wrote two stinging criticisms in Park Watch, including passing judgement on the behaviour of the timber industry:

*It is the death throes of the milling industry which have thrown up the most dust. As the industry groans slowly towards extinction in the Alps, it grabs feverishly at small remaining pockets of*

*timber, as though these small morsels will satisfy its ravenous maw. Incapable of dying gracefully, it thrashes about with its dragon's tail, blindly destroying all that it touches, too stupid to recognize that its greedy hunger builds even greater resistance to its continued actions. And politicians, ever cautious of the present, gravely sooth the diseased monster as it gasps towards its close.*<sup>63</sup>

Hamer and his new Minister for Conservation, Vasey Houghton, announced that the government would accept virtually all of the LCC recommendations, but even then the fight was not over. There was intense lobbying by opponents of the proposed parks, notably by the timber industry, from within the Liberal Party and from the National Party where Bruce Evans focused some of his attacks in the press on the VNPA. He described its members as a 'self-centred greedy minority' and had a terse exchange of correspondence with Geoff Durham.<sup>64</sup>

Community and political division delayed action by the government as the details were fought out, especially the issue of 'once-only logging' prior to declaration and then some ongoing logging, mining and grazing. In May 1981 the VNPA Council called a special meeting to discuss the legislation that had been presented to parliament and it was noted in the minutes that 'G. Durham thinks the L.C.C. is being used in a manner contrary to the original intention with special studies being done for small areas for special purposes.'<sup>65</sup>

Finally, later in 1981 legislation was passed to establish Bogong National Park (81,000 ha), Wonnangatta-Moroka National Park (107,000 ha), Cobberas-Tingaringy National Park (107,000 ha) and an extension to Snowy River National Park.

By then, faith in the Liberals was waning among environmentalists and there was mounting hope for a better



deal from a resurgent Labor Party. Eileen McKee wrote in *Park Watch* in late 1981:

*I see the conservation movement as 'the thin red line' between the environment and the developers. In Victoria, Mr Hamer's concern for 'quality of life' has given way to an obsession with 'quantity of money' and if you watch carefully you will be able to see your taxes at work helping the developers along, in the snow fields, in the coal to oil projects, in the alumina industry, but we pray not in a pulp mill or wood chip industry for East Gippsland.<sup>66</sup>*

Hamer had much broader problems than the chagrin of the environmental movement. The state had deep financial challenges, there was a festering issue over land scandals in the Housing Commission and dissent within the Liberals had steadily increased over a range of issues. Meanwhile the National Party was snapping at Hamer's heels and he had only just scraped back to power in the 1979 election with a miniscule majority. Hamer saw the writing on the wall and resigned in June 1981, to be replaced by Lindsay Thompson. At the next election, in April 1982, the political and environmental landscape was changed when Labor, led by John Cain junior, was elected.

The battle for a full Alpine National Park was renewed.

>> **Footnotes: page 64**



# CHAPTER 4: A CHANGE IN THE ENVIRONMENT 1982-92

## 4.1 The VNPA and the Cain/Kirner governments 1982-92

In Park Watch in mid-1982 Dick Johnson (VNPA President 1981-83) welcomed the election of the Labor government of John Cain in the previous April as 'A New Dawn for Conservation!!' and celebrated the end of the 'major rampage of intended destruction' of forests that he associated with the later years of the Liberal government.<sup>1</sup>

There were good grounds for his optimism as Labor had been elected on a platform that promised much to the environmental lobby, including the longed-for major Alpine National Park; a larger and better-protected Grampians National Park than had been first recommended by the LCC; more controls on the clearing of native forests and their replacement with pine plantations; controls on woodchipping; and a system of marine and coastal parks.<sup>2</sup>

Labor also had a number of members who had expressed environmental sensitivity, including Evan Walker who became Minister for Planning and Environment 1982-86, and Rod Mackenzie who was initially Minister of Forests and Minister of Lands 1982-83 and then Minister of Conservation, Forests and Lands (CF&L) 1983-85. Mackenzie was succeeded as Minister for CF&L by Joan Kirner, who arguably became Victoria's best-ever environment and conservation Minister (except perhaps in the protection of East Gippsland forests). After John Cain resigned in 1990 she was Premier until 1992.

Labor fulfilled much of this promise, particularly in its early years, which continued a pattern that has seen changes in governments generally followed by a period of significant environmental advances. (It might be pointed out that this pattern was discontinued by the Baillieu government in 2010 when



**Minister for Conservation, Forests and Lands Joan Kirner (left) and VNPA member Beverley Broadbent at the VNPA Picnic, 1987.**

it immediately began to strip back environmental protections.) As had also happened before, while many of the initial expectations of the new government were met, in the longer term the forces resisting environmental protection and the failing political strength of the government would result in increasing difficulty in maintaining the momentum of reform.

A major challenge for Labor was that it had serious internal divisions and external pressures over its environmental stance. Links with the trade union movement were strong, and unions, notably those in the timber and forestry industry, tended to be far more concerned with growth economics and jobs than with conservation matters. Much Labor support came from Melbourne and other large urban areas which tended to be more green in their sympathies. However, to win enough seats to

govern, Labor also had to appeal to rural regions where conservative (and often anti-conservation) communities were highly suspicious of city people, Labor and greenies, all of whom they saw in fairly negative terms. The Liberal and National parties played upon these Labor dilemmas in both urban and rural electorates. It was a challenging balancing act for Labor to meet the expectations of its supporters and win over sufficient conservative urban and rural support.

The 1980s also demonstrated that while the LCC was ostensibly independent and free of political interference, it could at times be influenced by the policies of the government and the wishes of Ministers. These could be made clear to the authorities and departments that were represented on the LCC, and subsequent LCC recommendations were likely to be in accord. The two areas in which





### Rocky landscape, Grampians National Park.

this influence was most obvious after the election of the Labor government were the Grampians NP and the Alpine NP. (The latter is dealt with below.)

When Labor came to power the Grampians situation was still not finalised. All sides were staunchly resisting the patchwork park that the LCC had recommended in 1981, but in May 1982, a few weeks after Labor came to office, the LCC issued its final recommendations. There had been a significant transformation as it now proposed a much larger area (166,000 ha) of mainly contiguous park without the many timber exclusion zones. All this was well received, but the VNPA was profoundly unhappy that there could be ongoing logging of up to 40% of the park for up to

fifteen years. Nevertheless, the government accepted virtually all the recommendations and legislated for this enlarged Grampians National Park (later given the Indigenous name Gariwerd) which was declared in 1984. At that time it was the largest Victorian national park, and an immense victory for the VNPA and other environmental groups.<sup>3</sup>

As well as establishing the Grampians NP, the 1984 legislation included extensions to six existing national parks, the creation of four new state parks, and extensions to many other types of park. These last included Cape Schanck Coastal Park and Gippsland Lakes Coastal Park.<sup>4</sup>

As the decade advanced the government supported and nudged the LCC towards the establishment and extension of numerous parks and

**All photographs in this chapter were taken and generously supplied by photographer David Tatnall, who took many photos of VNPA activities, events and people, as well as parks and other natural landscapes, in the 1980s and 1990s.**

protected areas, which resulted in a very impressive more than tripling of the area of the state held in protected reserves under the 1975 National Parks Act. In 1982 the National Parks Service had 985,113 ha under its control; by 1991 this had expanded to 2,780,000 ha. As Victoria's land area is about 22,760,000 ha, this represents an increase from about 2.3% to 8.2%. The number of parks had risen from the original thirteen in 1956 to more than one hundred in 1992.<sup>5</sup>

A significant part of this increase in area in the 1980s was in the





### **Mallee eucalypts and wildflowers in Murray-Sunset National Park.**

Mallee and Wimmera regions in the north-west and west of the state. They became a focus of renewed interest in the 1980s when the LCC undertook a second assessment process in the middle of the decade. Its initial proposals in 1985 were limited in extent and not well received by conservationists, especially as a large area of the Sunset Country was recommended for farming. Farmers leasing the land immediately began a rash of clearing, including bulldozing of Malleefowl mounds. After widespread protests about both the poor recommendations and the damage, the clearing was slowed and the LCC went back to the drawing board.<sup>6</sup> The final LCC recommendations in 1989 were a great improvement with significantly enlarged areas recommended for protection, although combined with some continued grazing, broombush harvesting and gypsum mining. The new parks were declared in June 1991. Wyperfeld was significantly expanded from 100,000 ha to 323,700 ha and took in some important floral

communities. A new Murray-Sunset NP of over 633,000 ha in the far north-west incorporated and greatly extended existing state parks to become the second largest national park in the state at that time. Both of these included significant Wilderness areas.<sup>7</sup>

Further south in the Wimmera, in 1988 Joan Kirner declared open a greatly expanded Little Desert National Park of 132,000 ha, finally bringing to a conclusion the watershed Victorian environmental controversy of 1969-70.<sup>8</sup>

The LCC also undertook two special studies at the start of the 1990s which impacted on the Mallee-Wimmera – on Rivers and Streams, and on Wilderness. The first resulted in part of the Wimmera River being designated a 'Heritage River' and the second led to legislation in 1992 that increased the number of Wilderness areas to twenty-two, encompassing 786,000 ha. This included three Wilderness Areas within Wyperfeld and a 'Remote and Natural Area',

while 28,800 ha was added to the Big Desert Wilderness Park.<sup>9</sup>

Apart from Cape Schanck Coastal Park and Gippsland Lakes Coastal Park mentioned above, the Cain government was initially slow to fulfil its 1982 election promise to establish a system of marine and coastal reserves. The VNPA maintained pressure and a 1983 issue of Park Watch was devoted to the need for marine reserves and the VNPA's proposals.<sup>10</sup> Eventually, in March 1986, Joan Kirner announced five new marine reserves and parks in South Gippsland – Wilsons Promontory Marine Reserve, Wilsons Promontory Marine Park, Shallow Inlet Marine and Coastal Park, Corner Inlet Marine and Coastal Park and Nooramunga Marine and Coastal Park. They covered a much smaller area than the VNPA had sought and had lower levels of restriction, but were much applauded.<sup>11</sup> In 1988 the VNPA listed marine conservation as one of the continuing 'neglected issues' in the state.<sup>12</sup>



Less successful was the VNPA campaign to have a national park declared over the Barmah forest on the Murray River, with its superb River Red Gums and wetlands. Once again, the struggle was largely against entrenched grazing and timber interests which fought to maintain their access to the grasses and trees in the region. A state park of 7,900 ha was legislated for in 1987 (along with five other state parks, including in the Otways and Grampians). However, the Liberal opposition succeeded in inserting amendments to allow ongoing grazing and timber cutting. VNPA campaigning continued, both to remove these anti-conservation activities and to lift Barmah's status to that of a national park.<sup>13</sup>

A significant achievement of Joan Kirner's period as Minister for CF&L was the passing of the Flora and Fauna Guarantee Act of 1988, the first legislation of its kind in Australia. It provided for the identification and protection all threatened species and ecological communities, the preservation of their habitat and controls on threats to them such as weeds, pollution and inappropriate development and exploitation. While it has not always been well resourced and enforced, the legislation became an important weapon in the environmentalists' armoury in the battle to save Victoria's natural heritage.

A complication in both the work of the Cain government and its relationship with the VNPA was the government's decision in 1983 to make major changes to its land-associated departmental administrative structure. Several previous departments and agencies that had been responsible for the management of public land were united into a new department of Conservation, Forests and Lands under Minister Rod Mackenzie.



**Conservation Minister Joan Kirner at the opening of extensions to Little Desert National Park, 28 May 1988.**

Rather than state-wide departments responsible for separate functions, there would now be eighteen regions across the state, each responsible for this clustering of government functions, including protected area management. At the same time, Evan Walker became Minister for Planning and Environment, thus separating public land planning from public land management, a division questioned by the VNPA.

On one level the creation of CF&L, or the 'mega-department' as it became known, appeared to be a logical and reasonable administrative structure. However, environmentalists were immediately suspicious that it would place the administrators of Lands and Forestry, often not renowned for their environmental understanding and sympathy, within the same regional division as the much smaller and administratively weaker conservation functions, including the National Parks Service. Who would be in charge of the regions? What would their attitudes be to conservation and protected areas? Would they have relevant expertise? As Geoff Durham pointed out, 'the danger is that the National Parks Service will be weakened and rendered less effective, or even obliterated.'<sup>14</sup> Another concern that emerged was that all CF&L members of the LCC would vote as a block, as decided by the Directorate, and not necessarily in the best interests of environmental protection. Over the years some of these fears

were realised, especially when it was felt that former FCV officers in CF&L frustrated and undermined environmental issues and had far too much influence within the department and on the LCC.<sup>15</sup>

A VNPA Restructure Watch committee was established, led by Geoff Durham, and throughout the mid-1980s the Association kept a watchful eye on the implementation of the new administrative structure, criticising and probing where they saw inappropriate actions or neglect of national park and environmental interests. There was some relief in 1984 when it was agreed that the NPS would retain a degree of separate identity within CF&L, but questions remained about resourcing and the expertise and priorities of regional management. In one case, the first stage of the Alpine National Park, the park/s overlapped six of the new regions, thus adding layers of administrative confusion. There was little doubt as far as the VNPA was concerned that this had been a restructure with few if any benefits for Victoria's conservation.<sup>16</sup>

While the Labor governments from 1982-92 achieved much, there were two particular areas in which the VNPA campaigned with limited success for many years – the Alps and East Gippsland.

## 4.2 The Alpine Campaign - Part 2

One of the early actions of Minister Evan Walker in 1982 was to direct the LCC to reopen its study of Victoria's north-east as a Special Investigation Area. The clear inference was that the LCC should examine how to bring about the government's stated policy of a large and contiguous Alpine NP. The VNPA was greatly cheered and quickly produced a submission that repeated its previous arguments, justifications and aspirations and reaffirmed the necessity of phasing out logging, mining and grazing.<sup>17</sup> It then looked forward with anxious anticipation to the LCC recommendations – and was generally not disappointed. As Dick Johnson later wrote:

*The LCC Final Recommendations of 1983 were a masterpiece of cartography, carefully stepping around the big stands of ash, soaking up big swathes of logged country, absorbing the Dartmouth Dam and establishing contiguity along the entire length of the NSW boundary with the Kosciusko National park. And it established the most intricate balance on timber reserves broken down to allocations for specific sawmills.*

*The millers growled and groaned at the time, but once the Final Recommendations were accepted by Cabinet, they virtually dropped out of the action and played only a minor role in the debate thereafter.... But the cattlemen were an entirely different matter.<sup>18</sup>*

Political reality then set in and it would be another six years of political battle and lobbying before the Alpine NP was finally legislated for and declared.<sup>19</sup> The main reason for the attenuated process was the opposition of the Liberal Party, the National Party and the Mountain Cattlemen, but compounded by political misjudgement in the Labor government.

For reasons that are not clear, but possibly because it lacked a majority in the Legislative Council (LC), the government had not presented the



**Dick Johnson in 1986. Author of *The Alps at the Crossroads* and an energetic campaigner for an Alpine National Park.**

Alpine legislation prior to the March 1985 state election. Labor won a narrow majority in the Legislative Assembly and for a brief period also had a one-seat majority in the LC. However, the result in the LC Province of Nunawading was so close and there were so many complications that a new poll was called for August. If Labor won, it would retain control of the LC, but if the Liberal opposition won Labor would lose its majority of the upper house. Both sides threw everything into the critical bye-election.

Dick Johnson and VNPA urged the government to pass the Alpine legislation through the LC while it still had control, and Joan Kirner reputedly argued the case in Cabinet. However, in an apparent misjudgement that the Alpine NP might be a vote-winning issue, the government did not act. Meanwhile, the Mountain Cattlemen mounted a very effective campaign in Nunawading, blitzing the electorate and riding their horses through the streets in an appeal to the spirit of the bush and the cultural heritage of the Man from Snowy River. Their campaign supported the Liberal Party candidate and was endorsed by the

conservative popular media. The Liberals won Nunawading, committed to reject the Alpine NP which they did when the legislation went to the LC in 1986.<sup>20</sup>

Hopes of establishing the contiguous Alpine NP receded once more. As Dick Johnson remarked, 'The VNPA sat down in despair to begin again – to pick up the pieces and prepare for the next decade of what was more and more seeming like an endless struggle.'<sup>21</sup>

Over these years the VNPA maintained its campaign and was fortunately in a position to employ people as specialist Alpine Projects Officers. At different times these included Carmel McPhee and Jamie Pittock – the latter also worked as Central Highlands Project Officer until his departure in 1992.<sup>22</sup>

In 1985 Joan Kirner had been appointed Minister for CF&L, a position to which she brought a new level of enthusiasm, determination and political guile to support the environmental cause.

Although the path through parliament for the Alpine park was apparently blocked, the VNPA increased its campaign and Mrs Kirner proved not to be averse to finding other ways to further the cause.

Two main new strategies were adopted. First, Mrs Kirner signed an arrangement with the governments of NSW, the ACT and the Commonwealth to manage the Australian Alps cooperatively. Administrative machinery was established and plans were drawn which introduced de facto management care for the region, almost as if it had legislative protection as part of a national park.<sup>23</sup>

Second, in 1987 the Cain government announced its intention



to seek World Heritage listing for parts of the Alps and East Gippsland. With fresh memories of the role played by World Heritage nomination in defeating Tasmanian government plans for the Franklin Dam in the early 1980s, the VNPA enthusiastically took up the issue. Geoff Mosley, who had been Executive Director of the Australian Conservation Foundation 1973-86, was commissioned in 1987 to prepare the nomination report which he presented in 1988. It was published by the VNPA and launched by Joan Kirner.<sup>24</sup> Although the VNPA and others continued to press the matter, World Heritage status was not achieved, but the process was a useful part of developing public understanding and political support for protection of the Alps.

A special coup by Mrs Kirner was her surprise purchase in April 1988 of the 445 hectares of Wonnangatta Station, a privately owned parcel of land in the middle of the Alpine country surrounded by Wonnangatta-Moroka National Park. The acquisition made it possible for the NPS to supervise activities in the region and reduce the mounting risk of damage by off-road driving and other uncontrolled activities.<sup>25</sup>

All this, of course, took place in the face of sustained attacks from those opposed to the Alpine park. One Age columnist even accused conservationists as conducting a 'war against our country cousins'.<sup>26</sup>

What finally brought about success in the Alps was a moderation in the Liberal Party's stand. Prior to the Victorian election in October 1988, the government again tabled an Alpine National Park Bill as an election sweetener. Together with the proposed World Heritage nomination, the Alpine park issue now put considerable pressure on the Liberal Party to make its environmental



**Victoria's Alpine National Park.**

credentials clear. Environmentalists received some encouragement from a new Shadow Minister for CF&L, Marie Tehan, and the VNPA felt sufficiently confident to appoint a full-time Project Officer (Jamie Pittock and then David Risstrom) to work on the Alpine campaign and liaise with Mrs Tehan and to facilitate the passage of the Bill.<sup>27</sup> However, the Liberals went to the election still essentially opposing the park.

Labor narrowly won the election, but did not gain control of the upper house. Having lost again, the Liberals became more reflective about the need to produce more popular policies and Marie Tehan was apparently able to make her party aware that it had a better chance of achieving government if it presented a greener face to the electorate.

In 1989 the Alpine Bill moved through parliament again, this time under the guidance of Joan Kirner's successor, Kay Setches. After a long debate, many amendments, much negotiation and substantial compromise the Bill was passed in May. There would be some ongoing timber cutting, and cattle grazing would continue to be a blight on the park, but for environmentalists the achievement and relief were immense. The Alpine National Park was declared on 2 December 1989.<sup>28</sup>

The Alpine National Park

contained 646,000 ha in the longed-for contiguous stretch of alpine country that ran east to west across approximately a third of the state. It consisted of an irregularly shaped series of large blocks that were connected by narrower corridors. The now contiguous areas, not all of which were technically included in the Alpine NP, were as follows. The most western large block, which lies east of Mansfield and Woods Point, contains the Wonnangatta-Moroka block, the Avon Wilderness and the Wabonga Plateau. These were linked to the large Bogong block, which was then narrowly connected to the Cobberas-Tingaringy block, which ran a substantial distance along the NSW border and adjoined the Snowy River National Park.<sup>29</sup> The protected region was very large, the range of ecosystems within it was very diverse, and the gift to Victoria's future generations was incalculable. It could be seen as a magnificent achievement for the VNPA and its allies who had fought for nearly four decades, but others were deeply disappointed. Geoff Mosley later wrote:

*With grazing more entrenched than ever before, with few areas of alpine ash stands in the park remaining unlogged and a tortuous boundary having been drawn to avoid permanent logging areas and alpine resorts it was very much a 'Clayton's park'.<sup>30</sup>*



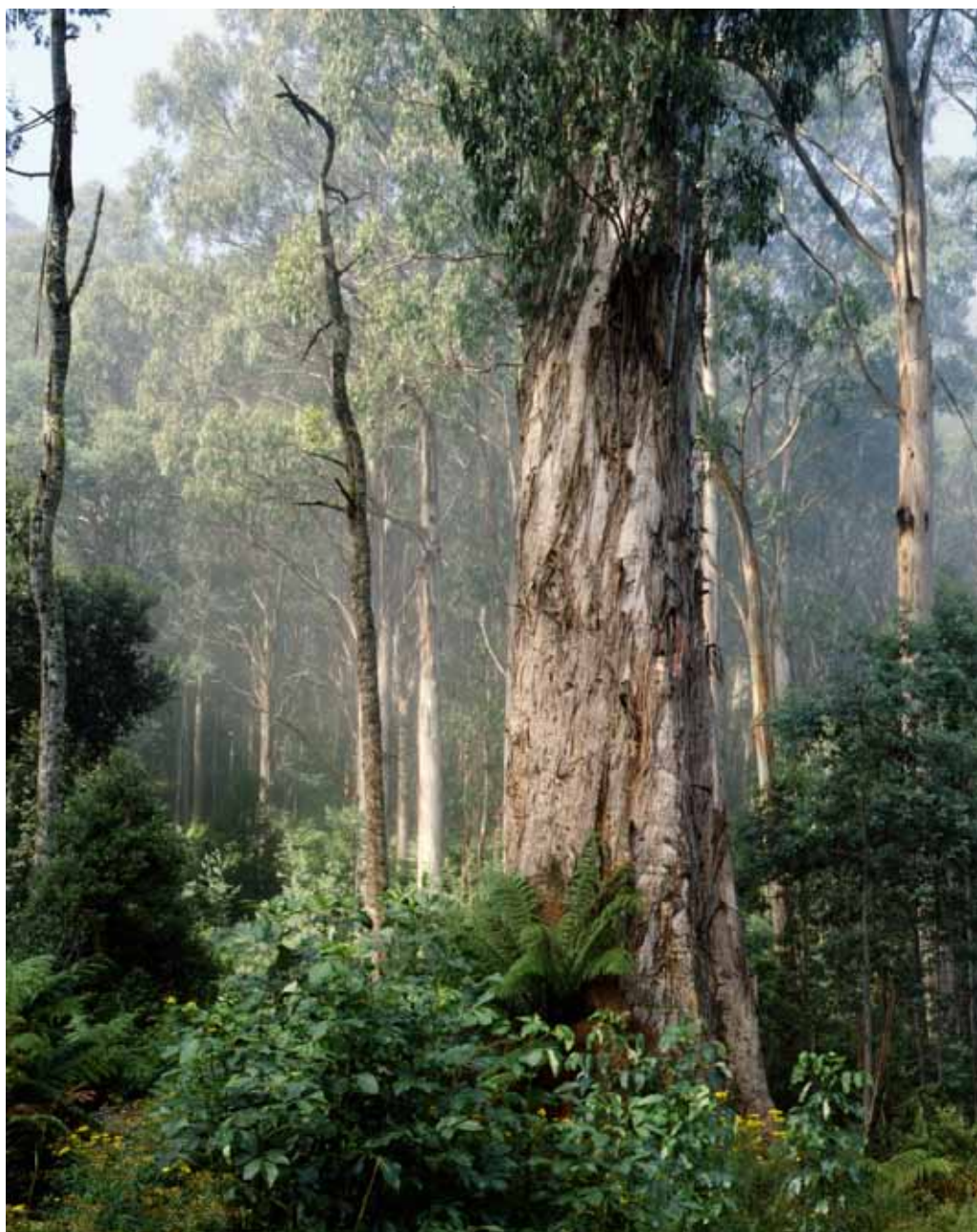
## 4.3 East Gippsland

While significant regions of north-eastern Victoria were now protected, further south and east in East Gippsland the Bicentenary Year 1988 also brought some success in establishing national parks. But the battle to save the forests would be ongoing.<sup>31</sup>

Much of the East Gippsland coast and its low hinterland had been encompassed in Croajingolong National Park in 1979. Further inland, as the land rises into the foothills and then towards the mountains of the Alps, it is more heavily forested, including areas of cool wet sclerophyll rainforest and fern gullies, the most important of which was on and around the Errinundra Plateau, where there were trees up to 500 years old. Victoria's largest remaining forest of mountain ash was in the Rodger River Basin, near the Snowy River NP. Its majestic stands of mature trees were greatly sought after by both environmentalists and the timber industry.<sup>32</sup>

East Gippsland is dissected by a number of rivers that gather their waters in the Alps and flow south out of the mountains towards the coast; these include the Snowy, Genoa, Wigan, Cann and Benn Rivers.<sup>33</sup> At the start of the 1980s there were three national parks in the region: the small Lind and Alfred NPs from the 1920s, and the first stage of the somewhat larger Snowy River NP in the north-west that was created in 1979.

Such a large and heavily timbered area was mouth-wateringly tempting for the timber industry and, as recounted in Chapter 3, there had been a substantial increase in activity in the 1970s, including some woodchipping. It had been subject to large-scale proposals for chipping licences and a pulp mill. Labor came to office in 1982 with a promise to control these expansions.



**Errinundra National Park.**

However, East Gippsland was the area about which VNPA and other environment groups would be most disappointed, and at odds with the Labor government. It was an immensely difficult issue for the government because of the political and economic pressures on it to provide sources of timber for

the industry and to sustain timber communities, and to stimulate regional economies while also placating the environmental vote. The rate of timber cutting was already beyond sustainability and reduced allocations were required, but people associated with the timber industry were often more



concerned with short-term profits, job security and even just survival, rather than long-term sustainability.<sup>34</sup> VNPA did not oppose timber logging in principle, but sought to ensure that it was done sustainably and away from the most important areas of old-growth forest.<sup>35</sup>

The government experienced great pressure to open up, log and chip the forests from the Victorian Sawmillers Association, large Japanese paper companies and other interested groups, including unions. Locally, there was mounting anger and alienation in towns and communities such as Orbost which looked to the maintenance of logging, the expansion of chipping and the establishment of a pulp mill as their promised future. The polarisation and intensity of the battle in the 1980s were similar to or even greater than the contemporary animosity over the Alps.

The fight for the East Gippsland forests also generated fresh challenges for the VNPA. The traditional VNPA role was to campaign and lobby through conventional means for the protection of natural systems and establishment of protected areas and national parks. However, in the 1980s and in East Gippsland an increasing presence in environmental campaigning was that of activist organisations such as Forest People and Environment East Gippsland, which were made up substantially of younger people using more confrontational direct-action methods including blockades. There was a minor crisis in 1991 when a green 'ecoterrorist' advice book was being sold in Melbourne and the VNPA was accused of supporting it. The situation became worse when a timber truck was damaged by a drill bit that had been buried in the ground with the intent of causing

damage. The VNPA was very concerned with its image and that it should not be associated with such actions. The Association therefore reacted strongly by complaining to the newspapers that had carried the story and setting out to explain to the public the sort of activities it actually undertook.<sup>36</sup>

The VNPA also faced something of an internal dilemma about whether at its core its purpose was essentially to focus on the creation and care of an ecologically diverse range of parks and protected areas across the state – or, as in the case of the East Gippsland forests, should it be fighting more broadly to protect wider regions from environmental threats, such as the ravages of the timber industry?

In East Gippsland the choice seemed fairly clear, and it was increasingly apparent that the VNPA could not afford to stand back. Largely under the pretence of using waste, woodchipping threatened widespread clearfelling of major areas of trees, with accompanying threats to endangered species and the loss of invaluable ecosystems. A potentially greater threat was a pulp mill which, to be economic, would act like a huge vacuum cleaner sucking in forests and water, and spewing out chemical and other waste.

In the event, while the Association was far from simply being a spectator on the sidelines in East Gippsland, because it was so much focused on the Alps and because other organisations took on much of the heavy lifting, the VNPA was slightly less central than in other campaigns. In August 1984 the Association joined with the Conservation Council of Victoria, the Australian Conservation Foundation, the Native Forests Action Council and the Wilderness Society to form

the East Gippsland Coalition (EGC) to fight a coordinated campaign.<sup>37</sup> The initial VNPA representatives were Graham Proctor, John Renowden and Dick Johnson. Through the EGC the VNPA was a significant player in East Gippsland, but not the main one.

Over the next several years the EGC put in an immense effort into trying to influence government policy, negating the forces of the former FCV and working with government and the timber industry to find sustainable solutions for the industry and its employees, and to improve forestry practices.

Soon after coming to power in 1982 the Cain government declared a moratorium on woodchip harvest licences and, in a reversal of Liberal government practice, insisted upon proper Environmental Impact Statements before future licences were issued in the Otways and East Gippsland. As it did with the Alps, the government ordered the LCC to undertake a review of East Gippsland.

However, logging was already under way at Rodger River, and while Minister Mackenzie was sympathetic to conservationist demands that it be stopped, it was another year until he was able to call a two-year moratorium while a Timber Industry Inquiry took place.

Meanwhile, logging continued on the Errinundra Plateau in 1984 in the face of a range of public protests and blockading by Forest People and the Nomadic Action Group. The government responded by moving to prevent such actions and many protesters were arrested. There were also cases of sabotage of equipment, angry confrontations and counter-protests.<sup>38</sup> Never before had there been such hardline environmental protest, authoritarian

response and local community anger and fear in Victoria.

The recommendations of the Timber Industry Inquiry in 1985 alarmed conservationists by opening the way to woodchipping and even to a pulp mill. When Minister Kirner essentially accepted its recommendations there was profound disappointment. The government then moved to the development of a Timber Industry Strategy (1986) and a Code of Forest Practice.<sup>39</sup> Although well-intentioned in endeavouring to achieve a sustainable and balanced continuation of the timber industry, such measures were unlikely ever to gratify the wishes of all sides. The Strategy was certainly viewed by environmentalists as handing too much to the loggers and chippers at the expense of intact ecosystems and endangered species, and the Code of Practice was demonstrated repeatedly to be breached and ignored by the loggers and the forest officers who were expected to supervise it.<sup>40</sup>

Both separately and through the EGC the VNPA maintained its East Gippsland campaign to save the forests and to establish more protected areas and parks.<sup>41</sup> In much of this the VNPA was represented for a number of years by Peter Christoff, who in 1986 was appointed the VNPA East Gippsland Project Officer. He became the very active face of VNPA in the campaign, and as its representative on the East Gippsland Coalition. He was also co-opted to the VNPA Council in 1986.<sup>42</sup>

Meanwhile, as tensions rose in 1984 the LCC had pushed on with its reassessment of East Gippsland and all sides of the debate lifted their campaigning.<sup>43</sup> The initial recommendations in May 1986 were unsatisfactory, with limited areas to

be protected and a lot given over to logging, and the way cleared for more chipping and a pulp mill. It was even proposed to revoke the national park status of the small Lind NP, which would have set a very dangerous precedent.<sup>44</sup> There were various meetings and protest marches by both sides, and a large rally by conservationists at the Myer Music Bowl in November 1986. An interesting new aspect was that in October the Australian Heritage Commission gave large areas of East Gippsland forests interim protective listing as part of the National Estate.<sup>45</sup>

The LCC's final recommendations in December 1986 were a minor improvement.<sup>46</sup> The move to downgrade the status of Lind NP was dropped, and three significant new areas of national park were proposed which, after a nerve-wracking delay to late 1987, were accepted by the government. The legislation was passed when, under the influence of its new Shadow Minister for CF&L, Marie Tehan, the Liberal Opposition agreed to pass it through the Legislative Council. The parks were declared in 1988. These included two of the most sought-after and contentious regions – Errinundra and Rodger River. Much of the Errinundra plateau was cordoned into the Errinundra National Park of 25,100 ha, and Snowy River National Park was extended to include much of the Rodger River catchment. The remote Coopracambra NP of 35,100 ha on the NSW border was created out of an upgraded and extended former state park.<sup>47</sup>

While the new national parks were celebrated, most of East Gippsland was, and would remain, unprotected, and under the LCC recommendations areas were earmarked for logging and woodchipping. The Victorian government issued licenses for

chipping to proceed and in 1988 some 100,000 tonnes of pulpwood were cut for woodchip exports. The government also called for expressions of interest to build a pulp and paper mill in East Gippsland, but the process was stopped in 1989 because of conflict with the federal government over the threat to forests that had been listed as part of the National Estate.<sup>48</sup>

In an effort to placate the environmental movement, late in the decade the EGC and the VNPA were granted some say in the selection of logging sites in East Gippsland and were involved in the complex, almost week-to-week negotiations over which coupes were to be logged and which places to be avoided.<sup>49</sup>

Another threat came at the end of the decade from proposals to build a Very Fast Train from Melbourne to Sydney which would run through the middle of East Gippsland, creating a great destructive scar between the Snowy River and Errinundra National Parks.<sup>50</sup> This proposal was raised again early in 2013.

To complicate matters further, as regions in East Gippsland were either protected or in dispute, the timber industry and their bureaucratic supporters began to turn more attention to the mountainous regions of ash forests that stretched eastward from Melbourne towards Gippsland. This region, which became known as the Central Highlands, had been largely burned out in the great 1939 bushfires. Some fifty years later the stands of regrowth were reaching maturity and the temptation for loggers was almost irresistible. From the late 1980s the Central Highlands emerged as the next great theatre in the war to save the forests from the chainsaw and the chipper.





Anti-logging protest at Brown Mountain, East Gippsland, 1990.

## 4.4 Within the VNPA

While the ongoing LCC processes and the fight to protect Victoria's natural heritage were inevitably the main focus of the VNPA, in the 1980s the Association worked continuously to expand its range of activities and its services to its members. These rose in number from 2170 in 1980 to 3719 in 1990, promoted in part by the public support for the major environmental controversies of the 1980s such as the Alpine and East Gippsland forests campaigns.<sup>51</sup>

*Park Watch* flourished as both the Association's principal public mouthpiece and its means of communication with members. Its editors during the decade included Dick Johnson, Eileen McKee, David Tatnall, James Calder and Chris Banks. In 1982 it was decided that the three-month break between issues of *Park Watch* was too long to keep members up-to-date on issues and events, so publication of a monthly Newsletter was introduced.

Organised bushwalks continued to attract members for their fellowship and to appreciate Victoria's natural environment. The Bushwalking and Activities Group lived up to its name and by the second half of the decade there was an organised walk or parallel activity virtually every weekend. An innovative variation began in 1982 when Geoff Durham started running 'Introduction Days' to educate people who were unfamiliar with the Victoria's flora and fauna, bushwalking, national parks and other natural and historic places. In due course these events became known as 'Walk, Talk & Gawks', and the name was registered by the VNPA as a business name and later as a trademark to obtain national protection. The VNPA Council adopted a Walk, Talk & Gawk policy. The walks were led by an authorised person with involvement by invitation



**Former VNPA Presidents Graham Wills-Johnson and Geoff Durham, 1986.**

of naturalists, park managers and others with appropriate expertise.<sup>52</sup>

The chance to help weed, revegetate and otherwise rehabilitate areas of bush had popular appeal and the number of Friends groups grew rapidly, to thirty in 1987 and to thirty-nine in 1990. One interesting group that was formed in the late 1980s to support the Flora and Fauna Guarantee legislation was not place-based but was a more inclusive Friends of Flora and Fauna.

In 1983 several of the Friends groups came together for the first of what became biennial conferences to discuss and coordinate their activities. Subsequently it was recognised that there would be great benefits in having a permanent umbrella body to coordinate and educate members of the groups, and to liaise with the National Parks Service. A Friends Committee was formed in 1986 with Geoff Durham as Convenor. However, in this case the VNPA faced something of a dilemma

about whether it would operate the Committee as a sub-committee of the Association, as it did with the Bushwalking and Activities Group, or would support an independent committee and new organisation. In due course the latter arrangement was agreed to, and in 1991 the Friends Network was formalised. It is now the Victorian Environmental Friends Network.<sup>53</sup>

As these references to Geoff Durham indicate, he was one of the major forces in the VNPA throughout the 1980s. Through his wise guidance in matters such as the mega-department and for a period as Treasurer, and his leadership in activities, bushwalking and the Friends, he made an enormous contribution.

Another to do so was Dick Johnson, who after his period as President in 1981-83 had stints as Secretary, Treasurer and Editor prior to his retirement from the Council in 1989. His was a constant and





**VNPA personalities and conservation activists Janet Coveney, Geoff Westcott, Eileen McKee and Philip Sutton, 1986.**

influential presence which shaped much of the public face and campaigning of the Association.

The other Presidents in the period were Geoff Nodin (1983-84), Dr Graham Wills-Johnson (1984-87, a chemistry lecturer at RMIT), Joan Lindros (1987-90) and Stephen Johnston (1990 – 93).

At the 1982 annual general meeting Ros Garnet retired from Council after thirty years of unstinting service to the VNPA. He remained a member, and generally an active one, until his death in 1998. His retirement was appropriately honoured by the VNPA.

At the same annual general meeting tributes were paid to Jean Blackburn, who had been a Councillor since 1957 and was Treasurer for a remarkable 25-year term – 1958-83. She died early in 1983.<sup>54</sup>

As the VNPA expanded its range of activities, increased its income from grants and other sources and

undertook membership drives, its administrative structure came under periodic review. It was no longer simply a voluntary organisation. An administrative review in 1983 recommended that a more senior person than an Office Manager was needed to run the organisation, and the Council decided to appoint a full-time Director. In fact, two short-lived appointments were made, in early 1984 and again in late 1984. The experiment being deemed not to have worked, it was decided to return to having an Office Manager in charge, and Cheryl Morvell was appointed in 1985. When she resigned in mid-1989 the VNPA advertised again for a Director, appointing Doug Humann who was already a member of Council. He served the VNPA with great effectiveness until 1997.<sup>55</sup>

As functions increased, so there was a rise in the number and variety of staff needed to run the VNPA operations, and for special tasks such as research projects and

organising campaigns as well as office and administrative functions. In 1984 VNPA was awarded a \$90,000 Community Employment Program grant to employ and train four unemployed people - a primary and a secondary teacher (to develop teaching materials), a secretary/book-keeper and a graphic artist (Philip Ingamells, now the VNPA's Parks Protection Project campaigner). Part of the grant was used to employ former Office Manager Eileen McKee to supervise them, though in fact three of them worked out of the National Parks Service office in East Melbourne.<sup>56</sup> There must have been a hum of activity around the office at that time, and in the next few years when others came in under the scheme.

The office was also made busier by the presence of many volunteers, and employees who were generally occupied with specific projects such as campaigns or work on a particular region, and usually on a part-time



basis. Research on vulnerable regions to obtain a better comprehension of their ecosystems and how to manage threats was a major component of the work undertaken by the office. The late Jenny Barnett, for example, focused on mining for some years; others who did research included Janet Coveney and James Ensor. At the 1994 Annual General Meeting three honorary life memberships were announced which point to the types of time contribution that were given to the VNPA in the 1980s. Janet Coveney had been a Councillor for twelve years, ten of these as Honorary Secretary, and a member of the Executive, as well as contributing in many other ways. Claire Coats had worked as a volunteer in the office for over ten years. Phil Ingamells had been involved in campaigns and other matters since the early 1980s, but was particularly recognised for his work with publications.<sup>57</sup> His is still a constant presence in the VNPA office in 2013.

Another major achievement was the publication of the VNPA's



**VNPA office manager Cheryl Morvell, 1986.**

second Nature Conservation Review. When Jean Blackburn died she left a generous bequest of more than \$24,000 to the VNPA. The Council decided to use the money to commission and publish an updated *Nature Conservation Review*, building on the example of the one produced by Judith Frankenberg and John Turner in 1971. In 1984, with the advice and guidance of Malcolm

Calder, the VNPA commissioned Doug Frood, a Research Fellow in the Botany Department at the University of Melbourne. In-kind support was given by the LCC and the University. As with its predecessor, the writing and production of the study became a drawn-out process, but it was finally launched in late 1987.<sup>58</sup> In some respects the delay was advantageous, as by the time the Review was published the LCC had effectively completed the first stage of its regional assessments of Victorian public land, and was commencing a second stage of re-examination and more detailed management planning. The Review provided valuable data and guidelines that were used by the LCC.<sup>59</sup>

In essence the purpose of the Review was to identify and summarise the existing information and research relating to Victoria's natural heritage, and 'to identify deficiencies in the adequacy of protection of the native plant and animal communities in the State'.<sup>60</sup> The focus on vegetation communities produced one unexpected result – it drew attention to the importance of grasslands as an ecosystem and to the parlous state of Victoria's indigenous grasslands,



**Conservation Minister Kay Setches at VNPA Picnic, 1988.**



most of which had been grazed, ploughed, built upon or otherwise destroyed. The Review stated:

*Very little remains of these formerly widespread vegetation types, at least in relatively intact condition, and relics are frequently deteriorating at an alarming rate. Little land remains in public ownership on the lowland plains, and demand for various types of public uses can be high. Grasslands in particular are extremely poorly represented in biological reserves, and species-rich examples are virtually confined to rail reserves, roadsides and cemeteries which have not been heavily grazed or subject to broad-scale disturbances such as ploughing or fertilizing. Larger areas of grassland in private ownership are mostly severely modified and deficient in indigenous species.*<sup>61</sup>

Thereafter, the VNPA gave more attention to remnant grasslands in its campaigning, established a Grasslands sub-committee and won a National Estate grant to study grasslands. One result of the attention given to grasslands was the creation of the small Terrick Terrick State Park (later National Park) containing one of the few remaining areas of remnant northern plains vegetation.<sup>62</sup>

The Review also noted the threatened state of many coastal vegetation communities, which both reflected existing VNPA interest in the matter and stimulated it further.

During the 1980s the VNPA expanded its popular and sometimes profitable publishing program with several more books.<sup>63</sup> In 1985 Sandra Bardwell's *Park Walks near Melbourne* was published and in due course it sold 10,000 copies.<sup>64</sup> Two other books were by Jane Calder. The first of these was *The Grampians: a noble range*, which was published in 1987. It was essentially a study of the natural history of the Grampians but also included a short history of the region and a brief account of the establishment of the national park.<sup>65</sup> Her second book, in 1990, was



**Author Jane Calder and designer Ann Wojczuk at the launch of 'The Grampians – a noble range', 1987.**



**Educator and VNPA activist the late Janet Coveney in 1986.**

Parks: Victoria's national and state parks, a very useful outline of and guide to Victoria's main protected areas.<sup>66</sup> Jenny Barnett, who would be a long-term employee of the VNPA as its Research Officer and a leading campaigner, had written a book which was originally published by the Town and Country Planning Association - *Standing Up for your Local Environment: an action guide*. In 1988 the VNPA published a second edition and then a revised edition in 1993.<sup>67</sup> The VNPA also published three books



**Naturalist and photographer the late Ian McCann in 1988. He produced the popular VNPA 'In Flower' guide books.**

of photographs by Ian McCann, of flowers in bioregions of the state. They were *The Mallee in Flower* (1989), *The Coast and Hinterland in Flower* (1992) and *The Grampians in Flower* (1994).<sup>68</sup>

## 4.5 Denouement

At the VNPA's fortieth anniversary picnic at Seawinds on the Mornington Peninsula in 1992 some 400 people gathered to celebrate and reflect on what had been achieved. Guests included Sir Rupert Hamer and several of the leading figures in the Association from across the decades.<sup>69</sup> To a large degree the VNPA could afford to congratulate itself on a job well done. Victoria now had a substantial network of protected areas covering a wide range of ecosystems, and the VNPA's role in achieving these had been fundamental.

As a consequence, the functions of the VNPA were evolving. Whereas for its first thirty or forty years it had been so largely focused on fighting against inappropriate exploitation of Victoria's natural heritage and for the establishment of new protected areas, an increasing proportion of the organisation's time and energy were now spent on maintenance matters. The reviewing and development of park management plans, supporting the National Parks Service and encouraging Friends groups were just part of the new direction.

Nevertheless, there were many of the old challenges still ahead, particularly the creation of a system of marine parks, the protection of Victoria's remaining forests (notably in East Gippsland and the Central Highlands) and the removal of cattle grazing from the Alpine National Park.

Problems in the economy and within the government brought a period of financial and political instability, including John Cain's retirement and Joan Kirner's elevation to Premier in August 1990. This period coincided with the VNPA's relationship with the government becoming increasingly fractious, substantially over East Gippsland and woodchipping, but matters



**Snowy River National Park.**

deteriorated further in 1990-91 when Steve Crabb was Minister for the Environment. His sympathies with and interest in the environment were not strong, but it was his decision to have yet another restructure of the renamed Department of Conservation and Environment that caused most trouble. The main element of the restructure was to move the central administrative offices of the departmental units out of

Melbourne and into regional centres. At the same time, there would be a significant reduction of staff numbers. The proposal brought a strong united action from both unions and environmental groups. The main concern of the environmentalists was that there would be another major disruption to the NPS, a loss of skills, a less effective department and a decline in research, and all for no apparent administrative advantage.



A battle ensued that dragged on for about eighteen months, culminating in a 'State Funeral for the Environment' protest march in October 1991. Crabb threatened to resign if he did not get his restructure, but a couple of months later Premier Kirner took the opportunity of moving him to another portfolio during a reshuffle. Barry Pullen was appointed Minister and he quietly dropped the restructure and set out to mend fences.<sup>70</sup>

However, it was clear that Labor had little chance of being re-elected in 1992 and that the Liberal Party led by the unpredictable Jeff Kennett would take government. Nevertheless, the VNPA were somewhat cheered by the fact that the Liberals had shown some signs of softening in their environmental policies and were more sympathetic in their consultations.<sup>71</sup> Time would tell.

>> **Footnotes: page 64**

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