

Conservation Journeys



by Dr Don Garden



VICTORIAN
NATIONAL PARKS
ASSOCIATION
Be part of nature

A history of VNPA
1952–2010 2nd edition



Conservation Journeys: A History of VNPA 1952–2010
by Dr Don Garden

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Gunaikurani and Bunurong Country, 1963.



About the author

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He is Honorary Secretary of the Royal Society of Tasmania, an Adjunct Professor at James Cook University, a committee member of the Old Treasury Building Management Committee (Melbourne), a committee member of the Sandringham and District Historical Society, a life member of the National Trust of Australia (Victoria) and of the Albany Historical Society, and a member of a number of other community history and heritage groups.

For many years he taught history and environmental history at the University of Melbourne. He has written 17 books, a mixture of local and regional histories, biography, company history, an environmental history of Australia and the Pacific and a history of El Niño events in Australia, New Zealand and the Pacific.

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Loch Ard Gorge, Port Campbell National Park, 1962 Dr Len Smith



Bogong High Plains Adam Ing



'Hands Off' protest, Wilsons Promontory, 1996 Jerry Galea, courtesy The Age



Weedy Seadragon Jack Breedon



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 in 1952.
 Right: J. Ros Garnet with his wife Elsie (third from left), daughter Joan (left), son John (right) and friends at Britannia Creek, 1953
 Courtesy DSE Historic Places and John Garnet

Introduction

The world's first national park came to pass not in Victoria, or 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 Victorian National Parks Association 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 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 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.

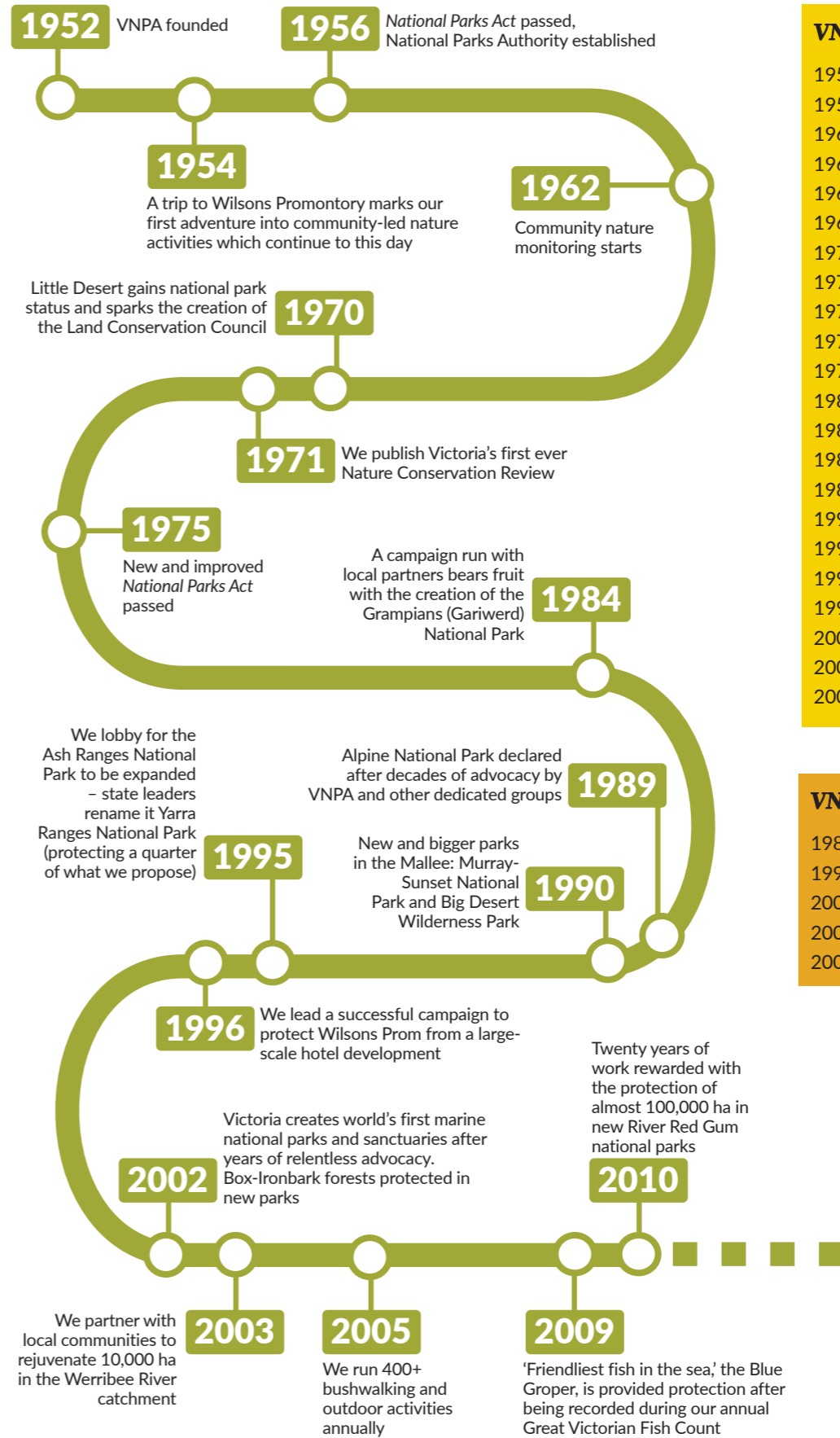
What VNPA will chronicle 70 years hence will depend on social, environmental and political factors, some of which we can reasonably expect to face, and others which we may never see coming. What we are confident will be chronicled, however, is that with your support, one of the voices heard speaking out on behalf of Victoria's wild places and wildlife will be ours.

This is the second edition of VNPA's history. As a celebration of our 60th anniversary, Dr Don Garden completed our history to 1992. For our 70th anniversary he has done a magnificent job of extending it to 2010.

We hope you enjoy reading it, and we welcome any feedback or comments you may have.

Matt Ruchel, Executive Director

VNPA timeline



VNPA Presidents

1952–57	Crosbie Morrison
1957–63	Hugh Wilson
1963–64	Ray Specht
1965–66	David Lahey
1966–67	J.H. Quirk
1968–71	Gwynneth Taylor
1971–74	Dr Malcolm Calder
1974–75	H.R. (Budge) Bleakley
1975–77	Dr Malcolm Calder
1977–78	H.R. (Budge) Bleakley
1978–81	Geoff Durham
1981–83	Dick Johnson
1983–84	Geoff Nodin
1984–87	Dr Graham Wills-Johnson
1987–90	Joan Lindros
1990–93	Stephen Johnston
1993–95	Tim O'Hara
1995–98	Anne Casey
1998–2001	James Ensor
2001–04	Ian Harris
2004–07	Bernie Fox
2007–10	Fred Gerardson

VNPA Directors

1989–97	Doug Humann
1997–2001	Amanda Martin
2001–03	Michael Fendley
2003–07	Charlie Sherwin
2007–	Matt Ruchel

1. Foundation and early years

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.¹

While modern definitions of national parks are more complex and tend to nominate and place greater emphasis on matters such as biodiversity, ecosystems, cultural heritage and minimum sizes,² this 1955 depiction of a park was indicative of the advanced environmental knowledge, philosophy and ambitions that were driving 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 19th 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, 19th 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 19th 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 governments 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 parts 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 Fern Tree 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 Fern Tree 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 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.³

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 as its joint honorary secretaries. A public meeting was 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 Wingan] inlets, East Gippsland; the islands surrounding Wilsons 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.⁴ In May 1909, a deputation took these resolutions to Premier John Murray and, although he responded favourably to the suggestions,⁵ there was little further enhancement of Victoria's parks in the coming years. The National Parks Association continued lobbying for parks in conjunction with other activities such as seeking to establish monuments to explorers⁶ – 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 1945.⁷

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.

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. Courtesy National Gallery of Victoria*

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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.



'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. It is on display at the Warrnambool Art Gallery
 Courtesy National Gallery of Victoria

Those areas subsequently absorbed into the post-1956 National Parks system were Fern Tree Gully, Wilsons Promontory, Mt Buffalo, Bulga, Churchill, 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.⁸ 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'. Across the coming decades it worked largely through monthly lecture meetings, frequent excursions and an informative newsletter to share and spread the interests of its members, setting a pattern which would subsequently be largely duplicated by VNPA.⁹

Prominent among other groups that were concerned about environmental degradation were bird watchers (the Bird Observers' Club, Royal Australasian Ornithologists' Union (RAOU) and Gould League of Bird Lovers) and bushwalkers (Federation of Victorian Walking Clubs (FVWC), Melbourne Bushwalkers, Melbourne Walking Club and Victorian Mountain Tramping Club). The Victorian Advisory Council on Flora and Fauna was also active in the 1930s and 1940s.¹⁰

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 League of

Victoria,¹¹ and in 1945, a relatively short-lived Council of Scientific Societies.¹²

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 29 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.¹³ Even if other circumstances had been favourable, however, this was a doomed effort as WWII began just over three weeks later. 🌿

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 instead on preservation for the sake of future scientific study or 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 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 WWII was the widely renowned writer, editor and broadcaster Crosbie Morrison (1900–1958 and President FNCV 1941–43) (see *biography*, p. 13). 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.'¹⁴

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, seconded by Margaret Wigan, he moved:

That the F.N.C.V. registers its abhorrence at the destruction of protected fauna in the Wilsons Promontory National Park, as reported in the Press and witnessed by some of its members, and stresses the need for a comprehensive plan for post-war rehabilitation of this and all our other fauna and flora sanctuaries; and that this motion be passed officially to both State and Federal authorities.¹⁵

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



Sightseers on the Monolith, Mt Buffalo National Park
 State Library Victoria

Walkers leaving Bindaree Hut, mt buller, New Year 1939. Keen bushwalker Jean Blackburn (third from left) was VNPA Treasurer 1959–83, and President of Melbourne Women's Walking Club 1956–57
 From 'Uphill After Lunch: the Melbourne Women's Walking Club 1922–1985'



“

During the 1930s and 1940s there was growing concern, perhaps a sense of alarm, ...about the degradation of the State's water systems, the need for soil conservation and the mounting loss of species.



The road to Lake Catani, Mt Buffalo National Park, 1930
State Library Victoria

the park was created to preserve.¹⁶

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 Mt Buffalo.¹⁷

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 20 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, active in the FNCV), F.S. Colliver (FNCV), J. Ros 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).¹⁸

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 parks¹⁹ and in June 1948 produced a widely-circulated 'Report on the National Parks and National Reserves of Victoria' containing damning criticisms and several recommendations.²⁰

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.²¹ 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 statewide 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.²²

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.²³ 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 FNCV Secretary, in order to become its President. His workload and achievements were enormous (see *biography*, p. 14).

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

The SDC report was finally released in



Philip Crosbie Morrison (left) with Committee of Management members at Mt Buffalo National Park, 1957
DSE Historic Places

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.²⁷

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, the period of mass use of the motor car and of greater public mobility began. The number of people able to reach and enjoy 'the bush' and state reserves for picnics or camping rose exponentially. In many respects, an increase in 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 still 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 21st century, and of course did not involve the widespread use of 4WD vehicles. However, visitor numbers were 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 the

start of this chapter.

Therefore when legislation along the lines of the SDC recommendations, the Tourist and National Parks Development Bill, was prepared and presented to the parliament in October 1952, it aroused both approval (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.²⁸ Perhaps that was not entirely unfortunate!



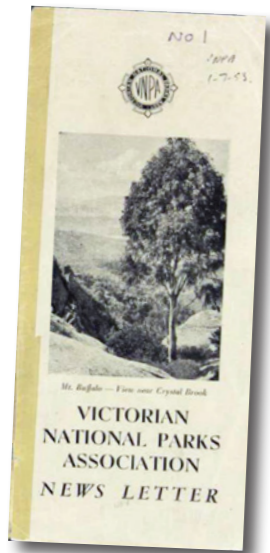
Tidal River valley, Wilsons Promontory National Park, showing effects of 1951 bushfire
DSE Historic Places



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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.

Creation of the Victorian National Parks Association



VNPA Newsletter, Issue #1

By the early 1950s, 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. This included the statement that 'This Conference resolve[s] itself into a permanent Association to be known as the Victorian National Parks Association'.²⁹ 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.*³⁰

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.³¹ 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 21 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.³²

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 80 individual members.³³

On 1 July 1953 the first *Newsletter* was published. It quoted the objects of the Association, which 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 cooperate with persons or organisations having similar objects or interests.

While the Association 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 Premier 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 VNPA's existence.

Meanwhile VNPA got on with its work and its first *Newsletter*, published on 1 July 1953, announced that VNPA's inaugural public meeting was to be held in the lower hall of the Melbourne Town Hall on 21 July 1953. So many people came that 'hundreds' were turned away.

Behind the scenes, the Council had decided that as the meeting was intended to garner

Biography: Crosbie Morrison and the formation of VNPA

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

For older members of 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 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 Australasian 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.

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 20 conservation and nature organisations which met on four occasions between 1946 and 1952, and which Morrison chaired.

In 1952, the conference decided 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 established and its Council appointed, with Morrison as President.

Morrison's chief ally in the FNCV, the Conference and in the establishment and operation of 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.

Frustration

The next three years were intensely frustrating for Morrison and 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.



Philip Crosbie Morrison

The NPA proved, despite Morrison's best efforts, to be weak and flawed in its powers, authority and 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 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 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

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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.

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 Queensland National Parks Association: *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.*³⁴

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.³⁵ *The Age* reported the meeting and a few days later published a supportive leading article.³⁶ 🌿

Biography: J. Ros Garnet and scenery preservation

In December 1958, 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 VNPA and its park policies.

Scenery preservation may seem 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?

In fact, '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 VNPA *Newsletter* no.22, November 1958, which, while anonymous, is strongly suspected 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 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 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 VNPA in 1952. Garnet was Secretary of the FNCV 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 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 from 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



J. Ros Garnet at Suggan Buggan, eastern Victoria, in 1970. Courtesy John Garnet

small number of books and numerous articles for the *Victorian Naturalist*, VNPA *Newsletter* and other journals.

His 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 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 VNPA, Victorian conservation and 'scenery preservation' as that most committed activist, Ros Garnet. 🌿

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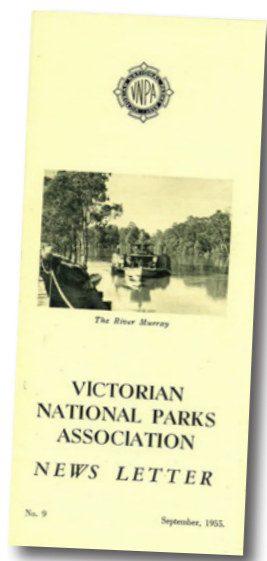
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The first campaigns – a push for national parks legislation



VNPA Newsletter, Issue #9, September 1955

From its beginnings in 1952, 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 creation of a quarterly *Newsletter*; and organising 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 30 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 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 Coranderrk Aboriginal Station at Healesville, and celebration when 340 acres was added to the Colin Mackenzie Sanctuary in 1955.
- Publicity about the 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 National Park.
- Trying to stop the spread of 1080 poison in Wyperfeld National Park.
- The start of a very long campaign to establish an Alpine National Park.
- A proposal for a new national park at Mt Richmond.
- Celebrations when, in 1955, the government reserved what would later become the first small section of the Little Desert National Park.³⁷

In the absence of frequent meetings, the *Newsletter* was VNPA's main voice in the world. It indicates that the members were knowledgeable in their diverse 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 VNPA policy on national parks³⁸ (boxed, opposite page).

Excursions and walks have always been a central function of 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 VNPA, was to Wilsons Promontory National Park during the Queen's Birthday weekend in June 1954.³⁹ The second was organised for the Australia Day weekend in January 1956 to Mt Buller, Mt Stirling and the headwaters of the Delatite River.⁴⁰

Perhaps inevitably, the main focus of 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 constantly sought to raise awareness of the issue and to enlist support.⁴¹

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 Victorian 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 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!'⁴²

To maintain 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 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.⁴³

True to his word, legislation was introduced late in the autumn session in May 1956 by 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 VNPA to have brought improvements.

The Victorian *National Parks Act* was finally passed on 25 October 1956. It established a National Parks Authority (NPA) 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 and fauna and national parks, and finally the Ski Association of Victoria. (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, Mt Buffalo, The Lakes, Lind, Alfred, Wingan Inlet, Mallacoota Inlet, Tarra Valley, Bulga 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.⁴⁴

After the years of struggle the initial response from VNPA was generally one of satisfaction, although there were still reservations and Ros Garnet commented that 'The Act' is recognised as an experimental measure, and it remains to be seen how far its administration will be successful'. On the positive side, there was

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 Newsletter, January 1954

much pleasure that in May 1957 Crosbie Morrison was appointed as the first Director of the NPA. The Hon. Alexander Fraser, Assistant Minister for Conservation, was appointed Chairman, and another member of 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. 🌿

Victoria's National Parks

1955



Toilet in Wyperfeld National Park, 1950s
Dr Len Smith

Descriptions of Victoria's national parks as they appeared in VNPA Newsletter in 1955.

Wyperfeld Est. 1921

Approx Area: 72,779 ha 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 Est. 1928

Approx Area: 569 8ha 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 within the Park.

Fern Tree Gully Est. 1927

Approx Area: 324 ha 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.



The Kiosk, Fern Tree Gully National Park
Rose Stereograph Co/SLV

Churchill Est. 1941 as Dandenong National Park, renamed 1944

Approx Area: 193 ha 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.

Southern coastline of Wilsons Promontory



Wilsons Promontory Est. 1898

Approx Area: 41,440 ha 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.

Mt Buffalo Est. 1898

Approx Area: 11,137 ha 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 areas.



Members of National Parks Authority explore Mallacoota Inlet National Park, May 1959 Dr Len Smith

Lind Est. 1925

Approx Area: 1165 ha 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 Est. 1925

Approx Area: 2072 ha 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.



The Chalet, Mt Buffalo National Park
Victorian Railways

Mallacoota Inlet Est. 1909

Approx Area: 4462 ha 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 grounds 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 a rich concentration of sub-tropical vegetation which occurs in the region.

Wingan Inlet Est. 1909

Approx Area: 1843 ha 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 NSW.

The Lakes (Sperm Whale Head) Est. 1956

Approx Area: 1843 ha 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 is the western limit of the Mahogany Gum (*Eucalyptus botriodes*). There are no facilities for tourists or visitors.

Bulga Est. 1906

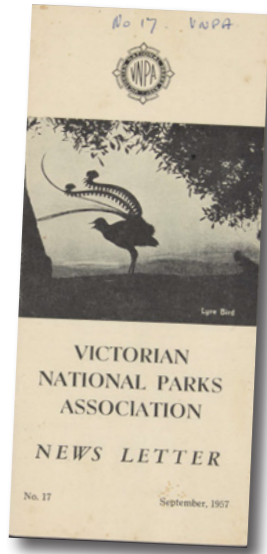
Approx Area: 37 ha Reserved in 1904 to preserve another remarkable fern gully and the associated rain-forest vegetation. The main gully is crossed by a long picturesque suspension bridge. This park also, is entered from the Grand Ridge Road two miles north of Tarra Valley at Balook, 1,900 feet above 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 Est. 1906

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

2. The difficult years: 1957–72

Conflicting ideologies in the 1960s



VNPA Newsletter, issue #17, September 1957

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 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 1960s 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 occurred 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 the combination of his ministerial responsibilities – for both 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.¹

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.'²

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.³

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 environmental book in the 20th century.⁴ 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.⁵

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*⁶ (VNPA Council sent Marshall a congratulatory letter⁷), Vincent Serventy's *A Continent in Danger*⁸ and Alan Moorhead's *The Fatal Impact*.⁹ In 1968, Geoff Moseley published a guide to Australian national parks;¹⁰ 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*.¹¹ These men were among our most prominent environmentalists. As



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

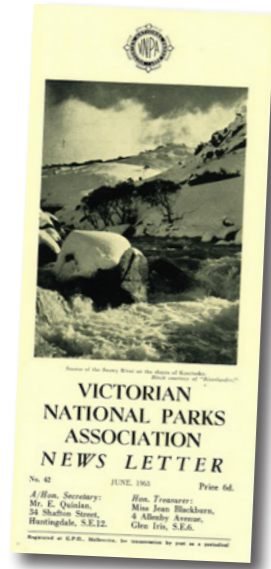
their concerns, and those of an increasing number of scientists and environmentalists became more widely known, so did the demand for greater recognition and action from politicians.

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

Sir Henry Bolte, Victorian Liberal Premier 1955–1972



VNPA and the National Parks Authority



VNPA Newsletter, issue #42, June 1963, with original mailing envelope

Crosbie Morrison resigned as President of 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 Mt Buffalo committee¹² – 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 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.¹³

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.¹⁴ Although there was minor community representation on the NPA it did not include VNPA, so when in 1959, the government proposed to add a representative of the Country Women's Association, VNPA was far from

impressed.¹⁵

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 1958.¹⁶ There was great sorrow across the Victorian community at his death and he is still 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 NPA Director by Dr Len 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 the 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 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 that could become protected areas. Another government body, the Land Utilisation 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.¹⁷

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



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



Barren hill at Balook, Tarra-Bulga National Park, 1959
Dr Len Smith

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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.

The work of VNPA



VNPA Newsletter, issue #54, September 1965

Most likely due to mounting community awareness of environmental matters and concern about the actions of the Bolte government, membership of 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 1970.¹⁹ 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, and people to meet and lobby.

Some members 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 and Finance; for individual campaigns for new parks in the Yarra Valley and the Alps; the inclusion of the Kulkyne into Hattah Lakes National Park; and a Master Plan committee for the development of a statewide land usage scheme.²⁰

As this indicates, one of the main concerns of 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 Kulkyne. However, prior to 1969, 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 Kulkyne 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.'²¹

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 VNPA had been advocating as parks for many years were deteriorating from commercial development and other exploitation.²²

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, VNPA would again have to shoulder the burden of providing leadership in the community and acting as a thorn 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, as it ran from 10am to 10pm, 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
- Kulkyne 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 Garnet²³

A long list of motions was passed and sent to the government, but with no result.²⁴ As the subjects of the presentations indicate, an increasing focus of 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.²⁵ 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, VNPA decided that it would have to do the work itself, or at least undertake the first stage of evaluating existing national parks 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 fundraising campaign promoted by David Lahey raised sufficient money to start the work.

With invaluable assistance and guidance from Professor John Turner, who from 1959 was a VNPA Council member, in 1965 VNPA 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 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 1971.²⁶ By then, there had been a major change in government administration, and a new authority, the



Mt Eccles National Park, 1960
Dr Len Smith

The cleared ski slopes at Cresta, Mt Buffalo National Park in the early 1960s



View of Lake Eildon from Cook Point, Fraser National Park, 1964
Dr Len Smith





John Hart Smith looks down on the Wilsons Promontory lighthouse, 1951
Dr Len Smith

Land Conservation Council (LCC), had been established to evaluate and advise on the use of Victorian public lands. The VNPA publication gave the LCC an excellent base from which to work.²⁷

Inevitably, most of the work of 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.²⁸ 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, Kulkynne, 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. Mallacoota Inlet National Park was a constant source of concern because VNPA wished to see it extended to the NSW border. However, sawmillers and the local shire were opposed. In 1964 the shire even applied to the NPA to excise thousands of acres from the national park (in exchange for other areas) to enable expansion of a town. When the NPA was slow to reject the notion, one VNPA member described it as 'supine'.²⁹ An even greater challenge in East Gippsland was the emergence of the woodchipping industry in the late 1960s.³⁰

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.³¹

One of the most interesting dilemmas facing VNPA involved the Sporting Shooters Association (SSA). In 1967, the SSA sought 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. 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.³²

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

Commercialisation of national parks

One of the most difficult issues for 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 extreme 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. 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.³³

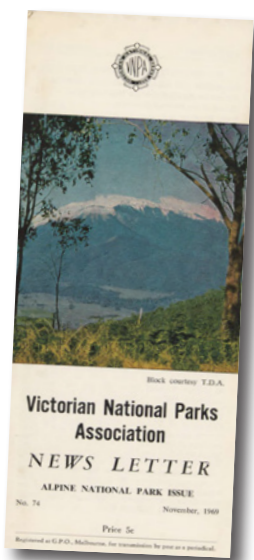
More serious was the question of the provision of recreational facilities and

Tatra Inn under construction at Mt Buffalo National Park, early 1960s



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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.



VNPA Newsletter, issue #74, November 1969

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 VNPA as essentially inappropriate. That brought them into frequent conflict with the Bolte government – and created a crisis in 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 (\$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 Mt Buffalo and Wilsons Promontory.

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 [the] 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.*³⁴

Nevertheless, VNPA seems to have done relatively little to try to prevent the initial development of a restaurant, some accommodation and other tourist facilities at Mt 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, VNPA was subsequently highly critical of the environmental damage and visual scar that resulted.³⁵

What created an even greater response from 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. 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 allow the lake or further development, and in 1975, the lease was bought back.³⁶

But it was the Wilsons Promontory proposal that elicited more immediate opposition from 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 VNPA, and its ongoing protection was dear to the heart of VNPA members, none more than Ros Garnet. In any case, the scale of the Wilsons Promontory development was horrifying – although 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.³⁷

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 been responsible for the new national parks regime and, while they were showing less interest in protection and more in development, VNPA still needed to work with them. As a result, in the early 1960s VNPA carefully expressed opposition to the motel because of its ‘luxurious’ nature and its likely location. 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.³⁸

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.³⁹

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 Wilsons Promontory’.⁴⁰

Hugh Wilson, the then VNPA 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 VNPA. Biologist Dr Ray Specht then became President and Garnet returned as Honorary Secretary.⁴¹

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.⁴²



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

Hattah Lakes National Park, 1959
Dr Len Smith



Tourists at Tidal River beach, Wilsons Promontory National Park, 1960s



Little Desert National Park



VNPA Newsletter, issue #76, June 1970

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 1968 decision by the government, pushed by Lands Minister Sir William McDonald, to clear and sell for farming most of the so-called Little Desert region in western Victoria. 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 long campaigning to have it reserved as Lower Glenelg National Park.

A strong community backlash was ignited against government plans in which 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 1970.⁴³

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 VNPA's 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 National Resources Conservation League, 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 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 statewide concern – will be the Conservation Council of Victoria (CCV).⁴⁴ 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.⁴⁵ The CCV was renamed Environment Victoria in 1995.

The second major repercussion was the commencement of a 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 National Park. 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 Bolte's governing Liberals lost in a landslide 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 five per cent compared with the then total of about one 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.⁴⁶

These legislative and administrative environmental reforms were 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 created a new Division responsible for national parks within the Department under the control of a Director of National Parks (initially Dr Len H Smith). Under this arrangement, a more professional National Parks Service was developed during the 1970s. 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 the future classification of Victorian public lands was handed to a new authority, the Land Conservation Council (LCC), 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.⁴⁷

Overall, 1960s had proved to be far more disappointing for VNPA than its members had expected following the *National Parks Act* passing in 1956. 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 such views were shared with most of his party, and even by the more reactionary members (and voters) in the National Party, 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. 🌿

Little Desert National Park
David Tatnall

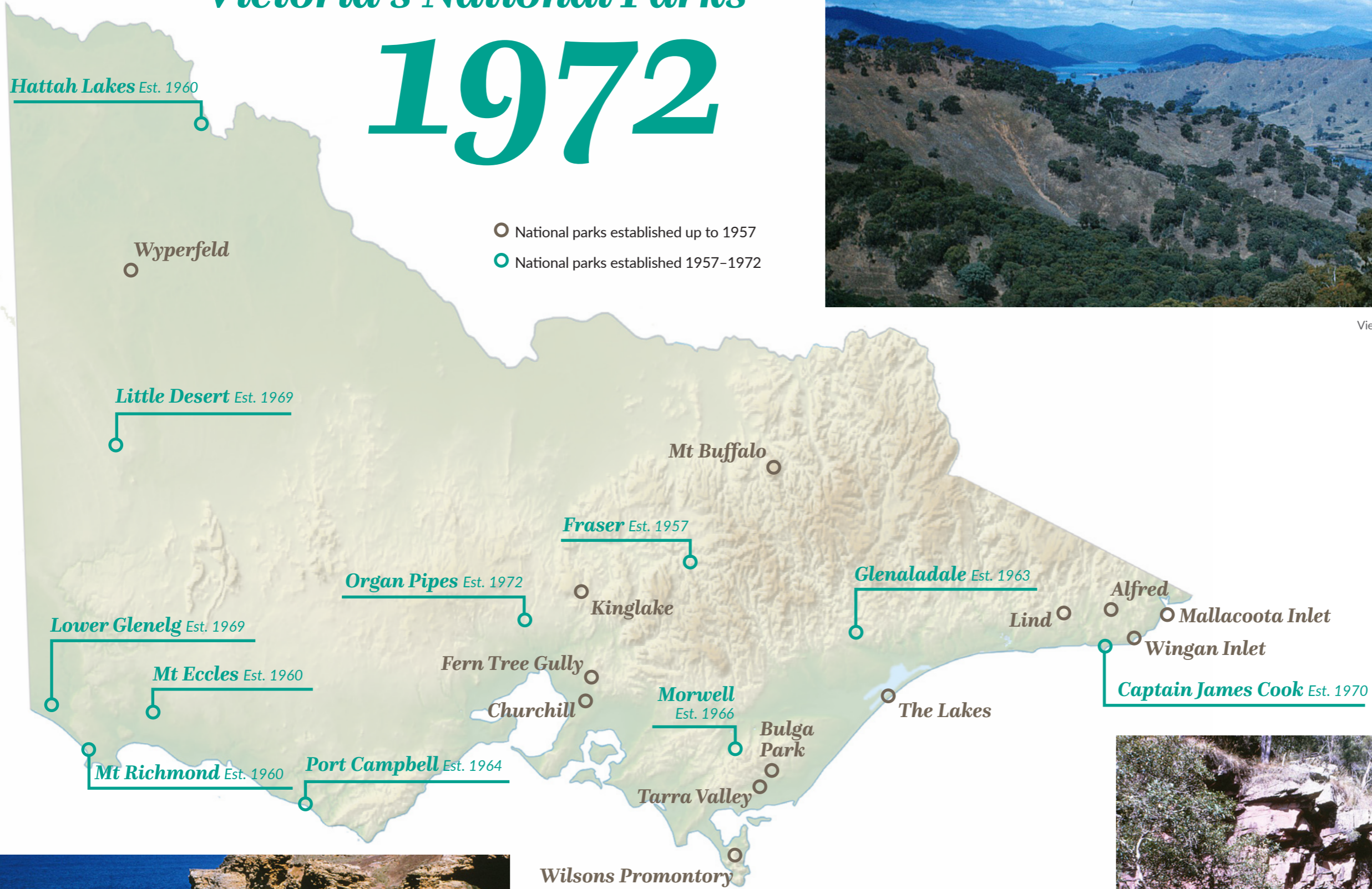


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The strength of the public protest movement was also credited with having a major influence on a by-election in the seat of Dandenong in December 1969 in which there was a landslide from Bolte's governing Liberals to the Labor Opposition.

Victoria's National Parks

1972



View of Lake Eildon, Fraser National Park, 1961 Dr Len Smith



Organ Pipes National Park
David Tatnall



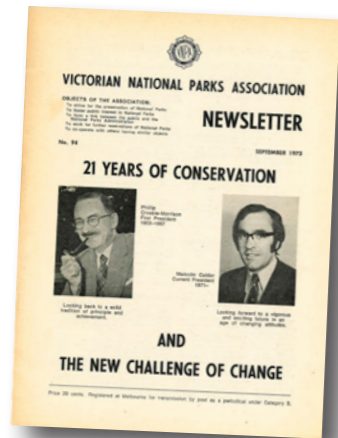
Loch Ard Gorge, Port Campbell
National Park, 1962
Dr Len Smith



Deadlock Creek, Glenaladale
National Park, 1964
Dr Len Smith

3. Highs and lows: 1972–82

VNPA and the Land Conservation Council



VNPA Newsletter, issue #94, September 1973

It is worth noting that since the 1950s VNPA, and the environmental movement more generally, have experienced a number of high points and low points. For a short period, all would seem promising and environmental protection would rise to the top of a wave, but this would soon be followed by a decline into another trough of resistance and opposition before slowly rising again. For 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 for evaluating 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, 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 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 be free from political influence, with Sam Dimmick, the Chair of the LCC, was a strong and independent force for conservation until he died in 1984.¹

The LCC process was one that enabled 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 VNPA and other environmental groups. Through the sheer hard work of its members, VNPA 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 actively 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 VNPA. In the early years, Professor John Turner was one of the community members, and Dr Malcolm Calder later 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. While there were statutory requirements for governments to respond to, politics often came to the fore. Governments were not required to endorse or proceed with implementing the recommendations of the LCC and so the list of unimplemented recommendations steadily lengthened.

In 1973, VNPA called upon Premier Dick Hamer to 'Make it Happen' as his election motto had promised, despite the resistance of 'farmers, sawmillers dune-buggy organisations' and other interest groups.²

While the small Organ Pipes National Park was established in 1972 on privately



Singing Honeyeater, Cape Schanck
Wikimedia Commons/Wampy

donated land, 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.³

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 Areas, Wilderness Areas, National Parks, State Parks, Regional Parks, Flora and Fauna Reserves, Natural Features and Scenic Reserves, Bushland Reserves and State Forests. In due course, there would be about 40 categories, which potentially caused more confusion than clarification.⁴ 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.⁵

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.

VNPA adapted to, and was somewhat transformed by, this new environment. Combined with the passing of its first generation of enthusiasts, the Association began to evolve into a very different organisation. 🌿

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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.

1977 VNPA Annual Picnic, with (from left) Budge Bleakley, J. Ros Garnet and Premier Dick Hamer R.P. Dunbar



Aspirations – the early 1970s



VNPA Newsletter, issue #95, November 1973

For 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 (known as the Country Party until 1975) 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 its Director until his retirement in 1975, when he was followed by John Brookes.⁶ 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. 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.

Other transformations in the political landscape followed the federal election in 1972, 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 VNPA, and there was also a written submission.⁷ 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 organisations. 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 VNPA and the CCV.⁸ 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 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.⁹ Finding someone to take over all the roles that Garnet had filled proved nearly impossible. Until this time VNPA had been entirely run by volunteers, but at about the same time as the office was established, VNPA was awarded state and Commonwealth grants to enable it to employ staff,¹⁰ which changed the nature of the organisation from its earlier 'amateur' model.

In September 1974, 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 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.¹¹

The reduced day-to-day administrative responsibilities somewhat freed the Council to concentrate on the LCC process, policy issues and the response 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 1971–78.¹²
- Dr Malcolm Calder, University of Melbourne botanist, President 1971–74 and 1975–77. He was active on the CCV and through that he served on the LCC 1983–94.

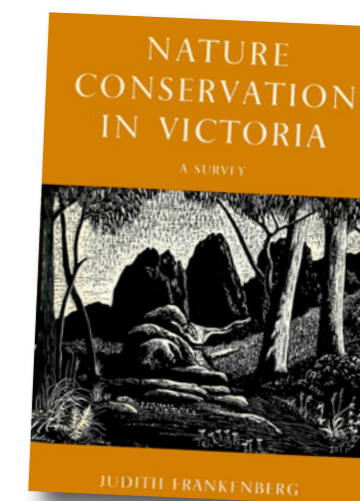
- H.R. (Budge) Bleakley, President 1974–75 and 1977–78, a leading figure in many conservation organisations including SOBAC, CCV and the National Parks Advisory Committee.¹³
- Eric Quinlan, a Councillor for 33 years who served in several capacities including Honorary Secretary and *Newsletter* editor. He was a major force in the Alpine campaign, excursion organiser and promoter of roadside conservation. He was also a committed Christian who believed that it was a Christian's duty to care for the planet and its creatures.¹⁴
- 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 VNPA survived and at times even prospered.¹⁵
- 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 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. 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.¹⁶ He also edited *Park Watch* for a number of years.

Newsletters played a critical role in the public face of VNPA and a great deal of effort and finance was invested in them.



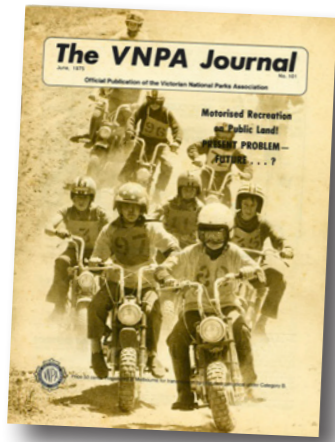
Nature Conservation Review 1971

Dr Len Smith, Director of National Parks 1958–75, in Sherbrooke Forest.



Bill Borthwick, Minister for Conservation (1970–79) at Hird Swamp Wildlife Reserve





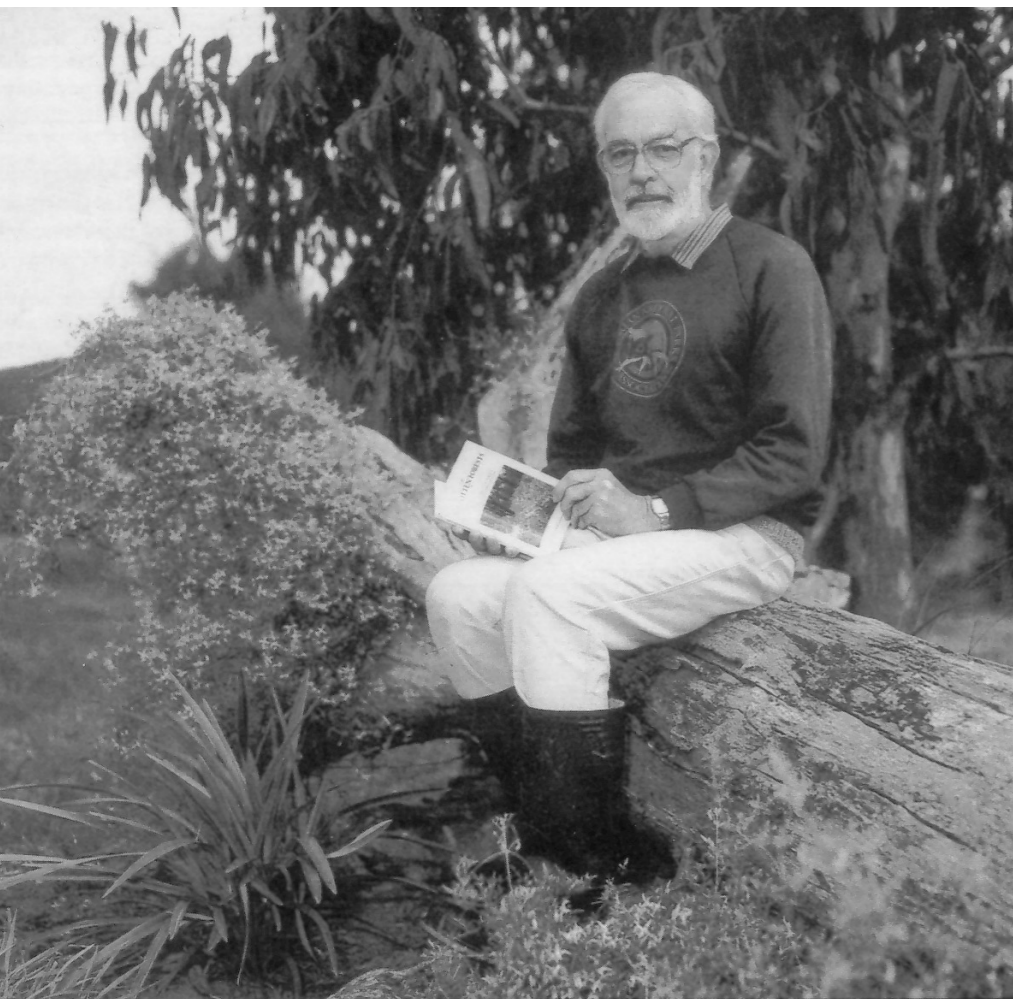
VNPA Journal, issue #101, June 1975

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 VNPA. By 1978, there were about 20 walks per year.¹⁷

An offshoot of the work of 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

Dr Malcolm Calder, VNPA President 1971-74 and 1975-77
Courtesy James Calder



control and revegetation. The park was transformed.¹⁸

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 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.

VNPA frequently looked beyond national parks to broader environmental issues, such as intensively promoting the care and protection of remnant vegetation in roadside reservations¹⁹ and opposing logging in water catchment areas.²⁰

Beyond Victoria, VNPA took an interest in events and threats occurring interstate and worldwide. The Association expressed alarm at the flooding of Lake Pedder²¹ 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.²²

Despite the lessons that should have been learned from 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.²³

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



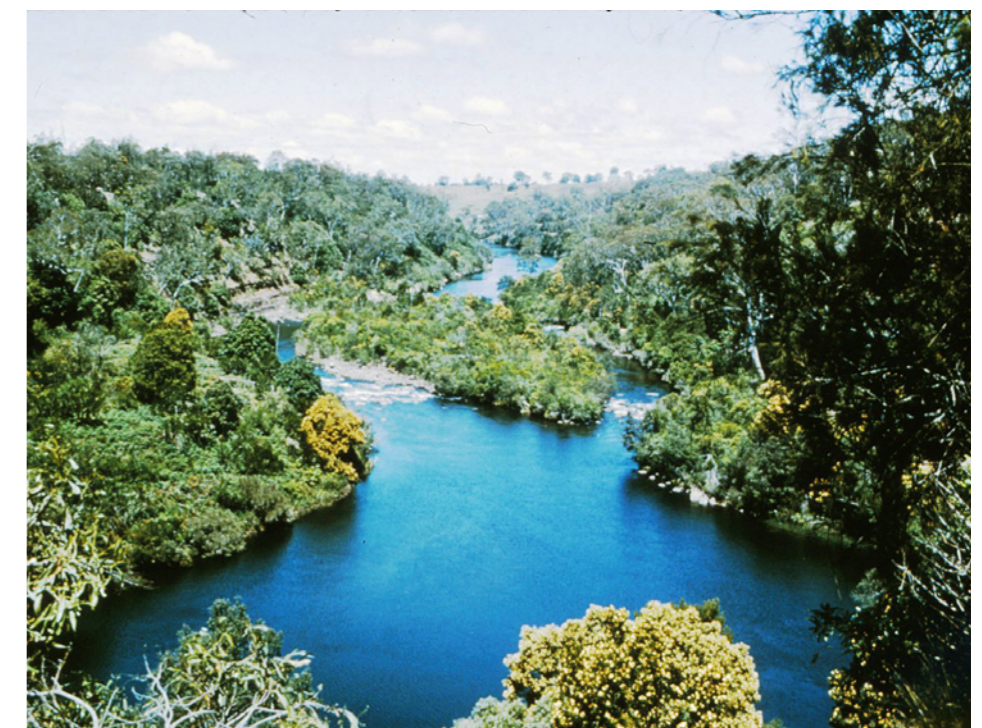
Don Marsh, one of the founders of the Friends of the Organ Pipes National Park, which helped restore the park's indigenous vegetation, at the site of the Organ Pipes car park, 1972.

matters, in 1973, the Land Rover Owners' Club objected to an item in the *Newsletter* that described owners and drivers of 4WD vehicles as 'mechanised morons'.²⁴ 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'.²⁵

The next edition had a special feature, 'Motorised Madness or Valid Recreation?', with a front cover photograph of young boys on trailbikes.²⁶ Strangely, in 1975, the Land Rover Owners' Club of Australia (Victorian Branch) became a corporate member of VNPA.²⁷ 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. 🌿

Mitchell River in Glenaladale (later Mitchell River) National Park, 1964 Dr Len Smith



Challenges and issues: 1975–1982



Dick (later Sir Rupert) Hamer, Victorian Liberal Premier, 1972–1981

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 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 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 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 (*Phytophthora cinnamomi*) 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.²⁸ Woodchipping of native forests was a particular bone of contention.²⁹

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.³⁰

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 timber and energy consumption, and the 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 VNPA and other environmentalists.³¹

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’.³²

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 Mt Gambier for processing. 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 pulp mill 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.³³ The conservation movement and parts of the Victorian community were alienated and enraged, as illustrated in *Park Watch*:

*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.*³⁴

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



The Grampians in the 1979. Grampians (Gariwerd) National Park was established in 1984
Ian McCann

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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.



Post-logging burning in East Gippsland
Judith Deland

Saving what was left of the Otway forests was also a source of great concern for 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, with its preliminary recommendations in early 1978 being 'blasted' by 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 1988.³⁶ *Park Watch* commented:

*There appears to be a complete 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.*³⁷

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 1985.³⁸

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, 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 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 the township of Halls Gap.³⁹ 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 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.⁴⁰

The initial LCC recommendations in 1981 received a mixed reaction from 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 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. VNPA held a public protest meeting⁴¹ and there was such a strong community response, that there was little further progress while the LCC and the Liberal government considered their positions.⁴²

East Gippsland also emerged in the late 1970s and early 1980s as a major source of concern for 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 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 the Errinundra Plateau and Rodger River regions, and the threat of woodchipping.⁴³

As the creation of Croajingolong National Park 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

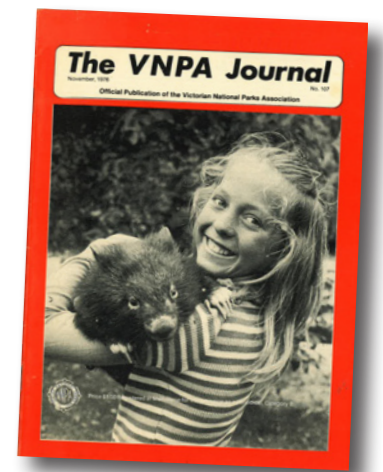
early 1980s. Most notably, to celebrate the centenary of Australia's first national park on 26 April 1879 – the Royal National Park near Sydney – the Victorian government established four new national parks, sixteen 'other' parks and some extensions to existing parks. The new national parks were Baw 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 National Park, 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.⁴⁴

As these terrestrial victories were achieved, 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. This began the long process of working towards the declaration of marine national parks and other protected zones.⁴⁵

However, it was the alpine region in Victoria's north-east that became the main focus of attention for VNPA in the second half of the 1970s. 🌿

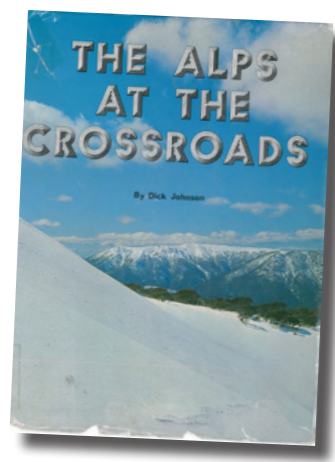


VNPA Journal, issue #107, November 1978

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...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 Alpine campaign – part 1



The Alps at the Crossroads
by Dick Johnson, 1974

Since the foundation of 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 a watchful eye kept 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’.⁴⁶

A much greater challenge was to fulfil an ambition which VNPA had aspired to since its foundation – the establishment of a large alpine national park stretching from the region east of Mt Baw Baw to the NSW border, and therefore, contiguous with NSW’s Kosciusko 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.⁴⁷

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 the 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.⁴⁸

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 the 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 strongly sympathised 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 threaten of 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.⁴⁹ It was reconvened in 1976 and made fresh recommendations, but it did little to reconcile the sparring groups.⁵⁰

While these early moves were taking place, 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, he would serve as President, Secretary, Editor and Treasurer), Johnson had a profound interest in the Alps issue. The book was financed largely by VNPA but with financial and research assistance from the Federation of Victorian Walking Clubs (FVWC) and the Save Our Bushlands Action Committee (SOBAC).⁵¹ 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.⁵² Johnson was a man of strong opinions and assertions, and not all 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 20th 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.⁵³

The number of sales was 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 VNPA came under sustained criticism over many years for their promotion of the alpine park.⁵⁴ 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.⁵⁵

Meanwhile 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 and 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.⁵⁶

During this time, there was mounting community tension in north-eastern Victoria and in 1976 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’.⁵⁷

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 per cent of the area would be in a protected zone and there would be no significant new national parks.⁵⁸

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. VNPA must have known that bad news was coming from the LCC as



Cypress-pines in the Victorian Alps

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 VNPA’s foundation meeting in 1952. As then, the crowd was so large that not everyone could gain entry.⁵⁹

Because of its ongoing campaign, 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

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A much greater challenge was to fulfil an ambition towards which VNPA had aspired since its foundation – the establishment of a large alpine national park stretching from the region east of Mt Baw Baw to the NSW border...



Park Watch, issue #127, Summer 1981

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.⁶⁰

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.⁶¹

In the months after the initial LCC recommendations were published, VNPA set to work to prepare its response, which it submitted later in 1978.⁶² This initiated 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 VNPA. Overall, 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 recognise 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.⁶³

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 VNPA. He described its members as a 'self-centred greedy minority' and had a terse exchange of correspondence with Geoff Durham.⁶⁴

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 of parks, and then some ongoing logging, mining and grazing. In May 1981, 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 LCC is being used in a manner contrary to the original intention with special studies being done for small areas for special purposes.'⁶⁵

Finally, 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.⁶⁶

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 minuscule 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.

This would mean that the battle for a full Alpine National Park was substantially renewed. 🙌



Geoff Durham, VNPA President, 1978-81

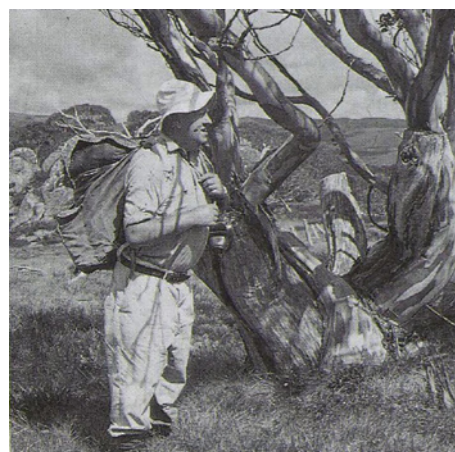


Dick Johnson in 1986. Author of *The Alps at the Crossroads* and VNPA President, 1981-83

Rocky Valley, above Falls Creek, Alpine National Park, 1988 Dr Len Smith

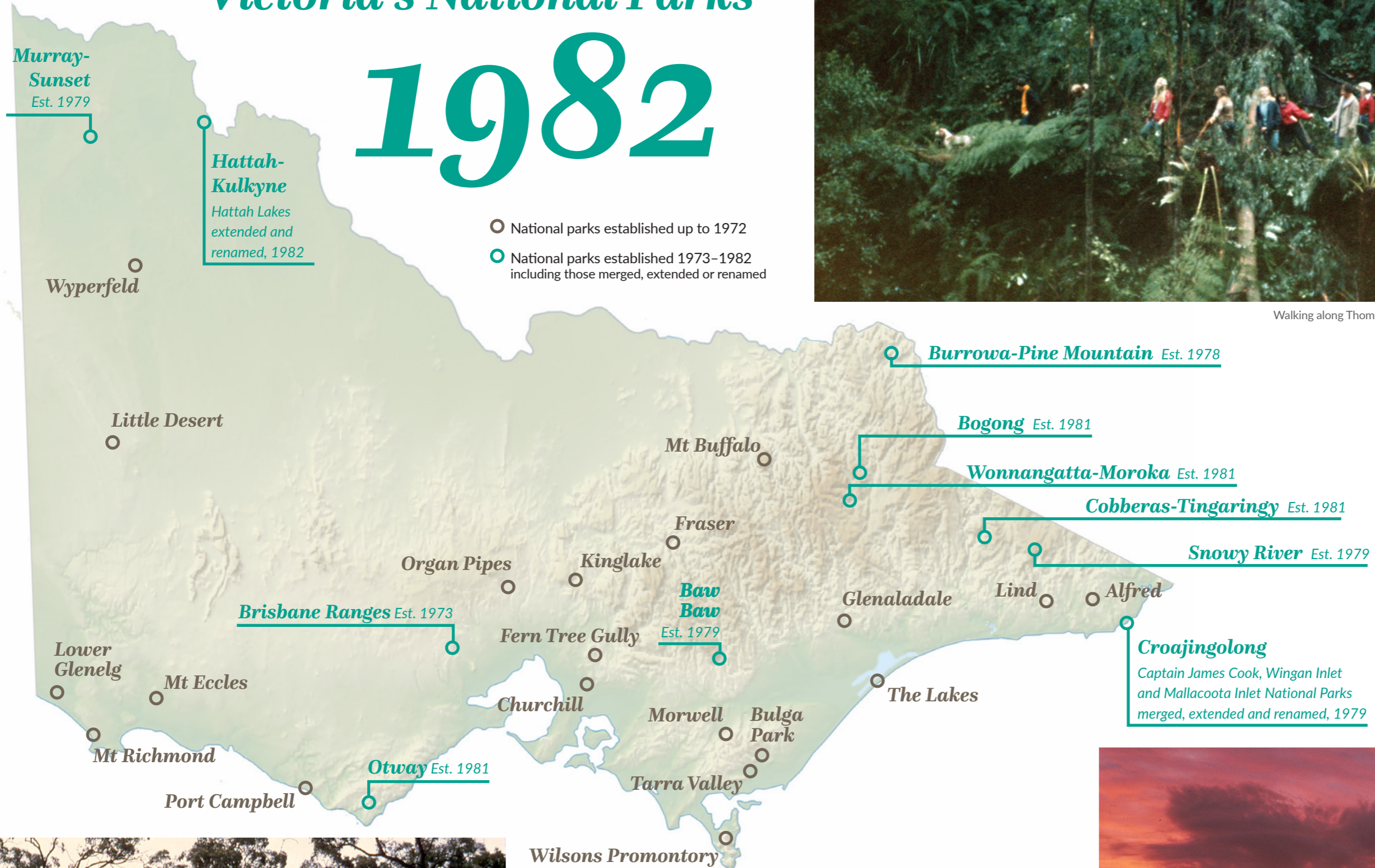


H R (Budge) Bleakley, VNPA President 1977-78, on a high country walk in 1994
Ted Faggetter



Victoria's National Parks

1982



Walking along Thomson River, Baw Baw National Park, 1981 Don Murray



Raymond Creek Falls, Snowy River National Park russellstreet/flickr



Brisbane Ranges National Park



Sunset in Croajingolong National Park, 1970 Dr Len Smith

4. A change in the environment: 1982–92

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.¹

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.²

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, Kirner 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 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 this influence was most obvious after the election of the Labor government were the Grampians (Gariwerd) National Park and the Alpine National Park.

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 VNPA was profoundly unhappy that there could be ongoing logging of up to 40 per cent of the park for up to 15 years. Nevertheless, the government accepted virtually all the recommendations and legislated for this enlarged Grampians National Park (later given the Aboriginal name Gariwerd) which was declared in 1984. At that time it was the largest Victorian national park, and an immense victory for VNPA and other environmental groups.³

As well as establishing the Grampians National Park, 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.⁴ As the decade advanced, the government supported and nudged the LCC towards the establishment and extension of numerous parks and protected areas, which resulted in a very impressive extension of the area of the state held in protected

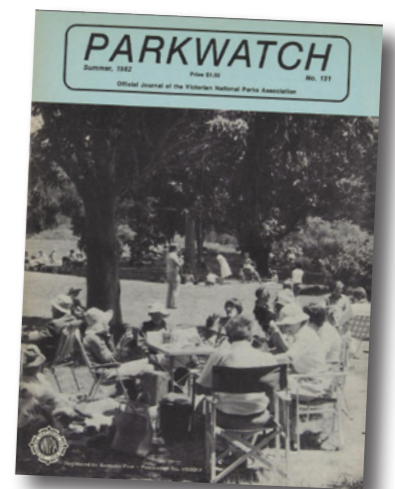


Grampians (Gariwerd) National Park
David Tatnall

Minister for Conservation, Forests and Lands
Joan Kirner (left) and VNPA member Beverley
Broadbent at VNPA Picnic, 1987
David Tatnall



Park Watch, issue #131, Summer 1982





Mallee eucalypts and wildflowers in Murray-Sunset National Park
David Tatnall

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 per cent to 8.2 per cent. The number of parks had risen from the original 13 in 1956 to more than one hundred in 1992.⁵ A significant part of this increase in area in the 1980s was in the 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 the 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.⁶ 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 National Park 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.⁷

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 1969–70.⁸

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 22, 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.⁹

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. VNPA maintained pressure and a 1983 issue of *Park Watch* was devoted to the need for marine reserves and VNPA's proposals.¹⁰ 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 VNPA had sought and had lower levels of restriction, but were much applauded.¹¹ In 1988, VNPA listed marine conservation as one of the continuing 'neglected issues' in the state.¹²

Less successful was 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.¹³

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 of

all threatened species and ecological communities, the preservation of their habitat and controls on threats 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 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 (CF&L) under Minister Rod Mackenzie. Rather than statewide departments responsible for separate functions, there would now be 18 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 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.'¹⁴ 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.¹⁵

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,



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

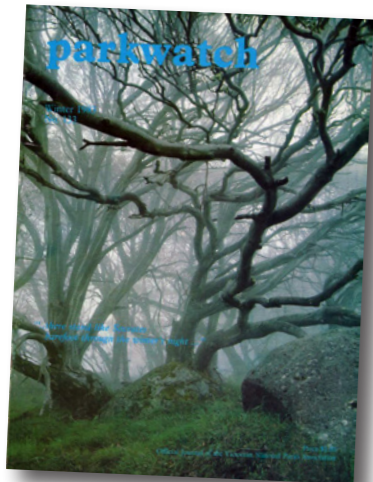
criticising and probing where they saw inappropriate actions or neglect of national park and environmental interests. There was some relief in 1984 when it was agreed that the NPS would retain a degree of separate identity within CF&L, but questions remained about resourcing, and the expertise and priorities 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 VNPA was concerned that this had been a restructure with few, if any benefits, for Victoria's conservation.¹⁶

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

Second VNPA logo, adopted in 1985



The Alpine campaign – part 2



Park Watch, issue #133, Winter 1983

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 National Park. VNPA was greatly cheered by the Minister's action, and quickly produced a submission that repeated its previous arguments, justifications and aspirations, and reaffirmed the necessity of phasing out logging, mining and grazing.¹⁷ 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.¹⁸

Political reality then set in and it would be another six years of political battle and lobbying before the Alpine National Park was finally legislated for, and declared.¹⁹ 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 upper house, the Legislative Council, the government had not presented the Alpine legislation prior to the March 1985 state election. Labor won a narrow majority in the lower house, the Legislative Assembly, and for a brief period also had a one-seat majority in the Legislative Council. However, the result in the 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 Council, but if the Opposition won, Labor would lose its majority in the upper house. Both sides threw everything into the critical by-election.

Dick Johnson and VNPA urged the government to pass the Alpine legislation through the Legislative Council while it still had control, and Joan Kirner reputedly argued the case in Cabinet. However, in an apparent judgement that the Alpine National Park might not 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, and committed to reject the Alpine National Park which they did when the legislation went to the Legislative Council in 1986.²⁰

Hopes of establishing the contiguous Alpine National Park receded once more. As Dick Johnson remarked, '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.'²¹

Over these years 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 1992.²²

In 1985, Joan Kirner had been appointed Minister for Conservation, Forests and Lands (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, VNPA increased its campaign and Kirner proved not to be averse to finding other ways to further the cause.

Two main new strategies were adopted. First, 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.²³

Second, in 1987, the Cain government announced its intention to seek World



Mt Feathertop, Alpine National Park
Mark Darragh

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, 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 VNPA and launched by Joan Kirner.²⁴ Although 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 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.²⁵

All this, of course, took place in the face of sustained attacks from those opposed to the alpine park. One writer in *The Age* even accused conservationists as conducting a 'war against our country cousins'.²⁶

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 credentials clear.

Environmentalists received some encouragement from a new Shadow Minister for CF&L, Marie Tehan, and 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.²⁷ However, the Liberals went to the election still essentially opposing the park.

Labor narrowly won the election, but did not gain control of the Legislative Council.

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



Old snow gum, Alpine National Park

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 1989.²⁸

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 National Park, were as follows. The most western large block,

which lies east of Mansfield and Woods Point, contains the Wonngangatta-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-Tingariny block, which ran a substantial distance along the NSW border and adjoined the Snowy River National Park.²⁹ 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 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'.³⁰*

**A contemporary slang term, a 'Clayton's park' is a park you're having when you're not having a park; a park in name only.*

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.³¹ 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 National Park. Its majestic stands of mature trees were greatly admired by environmentalists and sought after by the timber industry.³²

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.³³ At the start of the 1980s there were three national parks in the region: the small Lind and Alfred National Parks from the 1920s, and the first stage of the somewhat larger Snowy River National Park 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.

However, East Gippsland was the area which would most disappoint VNPA and other environment groups, and place them 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, sustain timber communities, and 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.³⁴ 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.³⁵

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 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-

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East Gippsland was the area about which VNPA and other environment groups would be most disappointed, and at odds with the Labor government.

Logging in East Gippsland
Judith Deland



action methods including blockades. There was a minor crisis in 1991 when a green 'ecoterrorist' advice book was being sold in Melbourne and 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. 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.³⁶

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, to fighting more broadly to protect wider regions from environmental threats, such as the ravages of the timber industry.

Errinundra National Park



In East Gippsland, the choice seemed fairly clear, and it was increasingly apparent that 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, VNPA was slightly less involved 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.³⁷ The initial VNPA representatives were Graham Proctor, John Renowden and Dick Johnson. Through the EGC, 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.³⁸ Never before had there been such hardline



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

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.³⁹ 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 repeatedly breached and ignored by the loggers and the forest officers who were expected to supervise it.⁴⁰

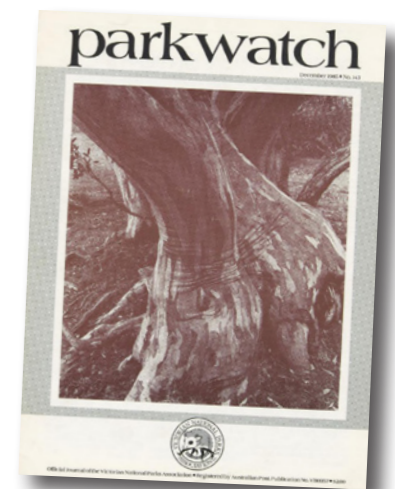
Both separately, and through the EGC, VNPA maintained its East Gippsland campaign to save the forests and to establish more protected areas and parks.⁴¹ In much of this, VNPA was represented for a number of years by Peter Christoff,

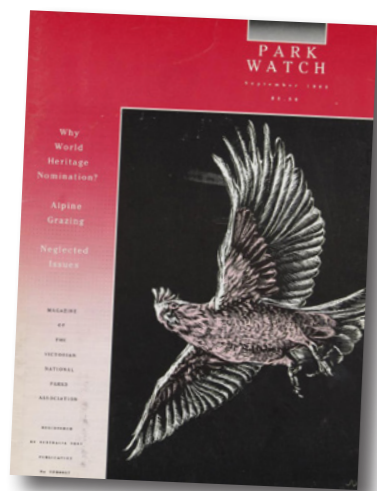
who in 1986 was appointed VNPA East Gippsland Project Officer. He became the very active face of VNPA in the campaign, and as its representative on the East Gippsland Coalition. He was also co-opted to VNPA Council in 1986.⁴²

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.⁴³ 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 National Park, which would have set a very dangerous precedent.⁴⁴ 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.⁴⁵

The LCC's final recommendations in December 1986 were a minor improvement.⁴⁶ The move to downgrade the status of Lind National Park was dropped, and three significant new areas

Park Watch, issue #143, December 1985





Park Watch, issue #154, September 1988

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 Cooperambra National Park of 35,100 ha on the NSW border was created out of an upgraded and extended former state park.⁴⁷

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.⁴⁸

In an effort to placate the environmental movement, late in the decade the EGC and 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.⁴⁹

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.⁵⁰ 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, 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. 🌿

Illegal logging in the rainforest, West Errinundra Block, East Gippsland
Jamie Pittock



Within VNPA

While the ongoing LCC processes and the fight to protect Victoria's natural heritage were inevitably the main focus of 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.⁵¹

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 the opportunity 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 Victoria's flora and fauna, bushwalking, national parks and other natural formations and historic places. In due course, these events became known as 'Walk, Talk and Gawk', which was registered by VNPA as a business name and later as a trademark to obtain national protection. VNPA Council adopted a Walk, Talk and Gawk policy. The walks were led by an authorised person with the involvement, by invitation, of naturalists, park managers and others with appropriate expertise.⁵²

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 to 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



Graham Wills-Johnson (VNPA President, 1984–87) and Geoff Durham, 1986

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 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.⁵³

As these references to Geoff Durham indicate, he was one of the major forces in VNPA throughout the 1980s. Through his wise guidance in matters such as to do with the mega-department of CF&L, as well as 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 influential presence shaping much of the public face and campaigning of the Association.

The other Presidents in the period were Geoff Nodin (1983–84), Dr Graham Wills-

Joan Lindros, VNPA President 1987–90





Educator and VNPA activist Janet Coveney, 1986

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 VNPA. He remained a member, and generally an active one, until his death in 1998. His retirement was appropriately honoured by 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 in 1983.⁵⁴

As 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, VNPA advertised again for a Director, appointing Doug Humann who was already a member of Council. He served VNPA with great effectiveness until 1997.⁵⁵

VNPA Office Manager Cheryl Morvell, 1986



As functions increased, so there was a rise in the number and variety of staff needed to run 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, later 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.⁵⁶ There was 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. 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 for contributions by particular individuals to VNPA in the 1980s. Janet Coveney had been a Councillor for 12 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.⁵⁷

Another major achievement was the publication of VNPA's second *Nature Conservation Review*. When Jean Blackburn died she left a generous bequest of more than \$24,000 to 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, VNPA commissioned Doug Froom, 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-



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

out process, but it was finally launched in late 1987.⁵⁸ 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.⁵⁹

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'.⁶⁰ 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, 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 fertilising. Larger areas of grassland in private ownership are mostly severely modified and deficient in indigenous species.*⁶¹

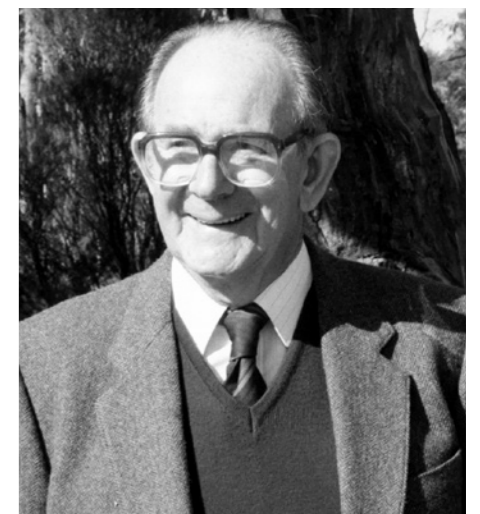
Thereafter, VNPA gave more attention to remnant grasslands in its campaigning, established a Grasslands sub-committee, and won a National Estate grant to study grasslands. One result of the attention given to grasslands was the creation of the small Terrick Terrick State Park (later National Park) containing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

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, VNPA expanded its popular and sometimes profitable publishing program with several more books.⁶³ In 1985, Sandra Bardwell's *Park Walks near Melbourne* was published and in due course sold 10,000 copies.⁶⁴

Two other books by Jane Calder were published. 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

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





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

and a brief account of the establishment of the national park.⁶⁵ Her second book, in 1990, was *Parks: Victoria's National and State Parks*, a very useful outline of and guide to Victoria's main protected areas.⁶⁶

Jenny Barnett, who would be a long-term employee of 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, VNPA published a second edition, and then a revised edition in 1993.⁶⁷

VNPA also published three 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).⁶⁸

Conservation Minister Kay Setches at VNPA Picnic, 1988



Denouement

At 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.⁶⁹ To a large degree, 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 VNPA's role in achieving these had been fundamental.

As a consequence, the functions of VNPA were evolving. Whereas for its first 30 or 40 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 was 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.

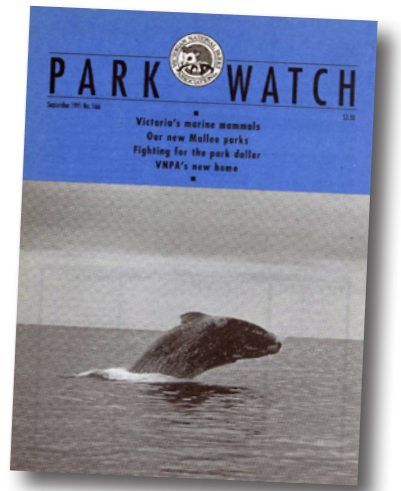
Nevertheless, there were many of the old challenges still ahead, particularly the creation of a system of marine parks, the protection of Victoria's remaining forests (notably in East Gippsland and the Central Highlands) and the removal of cattle grazing from the Alpine National Park.

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 VNPA's relationship with the Victorian government becoming increasingly fractious, substantially over East Gippsland and woodchipping, but matters 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 18 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.⁷⁰

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, 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.⁷¹ Time would tell.



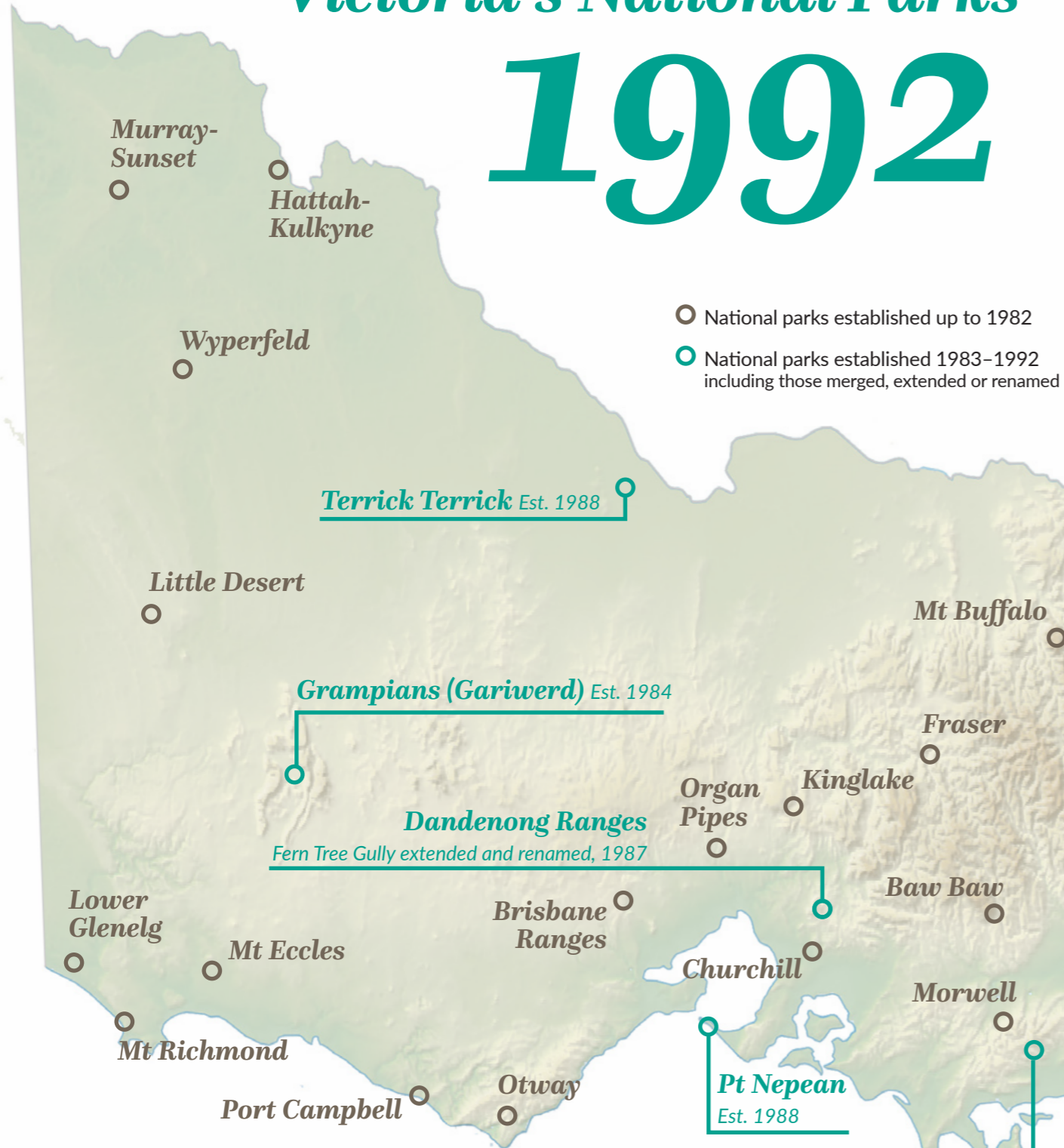
Park Watch, issue #166, September 1991

Jamie Pittock, wearing his farewell gift the VNPA office, 1992



Victoria's National Parks

1992



The Ruined Castle, near Rocky Valley Dam, Alpine National Park, 1988 Dr Len Smith



Jones Creek, Coopracambra National Park John Tann/Wikimedia Commons



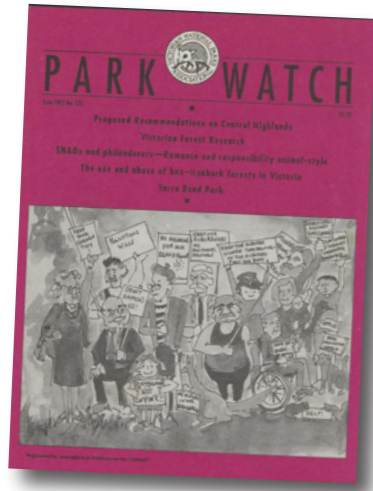
Terrick Terrick National Park



Major Mitchell Plateau, Grampians (Gariwerd) National Park, 1988 Martin Lenard

5. People caring for nature: 1993–99

A change of government



Park Watch, issue #173, June 1993

In its early years VNPA's motto was 'National Parks, for all people for all time', which was subsequently changed to 'Parks are for People'. In 1995, the Association adopted the motto 'People Caring for Nature'. The discussions behind this subtle change are unknown, but it can be seen as highly nuanced and indicative of both an important evolution in the role of VNPA, and a reflection of stressful times in the 1990s.

Although there were still obvious gaps in the Victorian park system which needed to be filled, during the decade VNPA was forced to focus significantly on a wider range of challenges to the natural environment in Victoria, the most disappointing being that much of its time, energy and resources were spent fighting a rear-guard defence of what had been won since the 1950s.

This resulted from the political environment created by the Kennett government in its neo-liberal faith in small government and market forces, and its utilitarian view of the natural environment, both of which eroded the values that had created the national park system. Government decisions frequently threatened environmental degradation through inappropriate tourist developments, commercialisation and privatisation.

VNPA's new motto, agreed to at a conference, reinforced the point that the natural environment should not be seen essentially as a resource providing recreational and financial benefits for humans, but should be cared for and protected for its own value.¹

It has always been VNPA policy to remain party-political neutral, and since its foundation in 1952, both sides of politics have provided periods of both support and reluctance in environmental matters, and for national parks. Not-for-profit organisations that are active in fields not always well supported by governments, both politicians and public servants, must walk a fine line between advocacy and criticism, maintaining good levels of communication while being able to criticise

where necessary, and express gratitude when possible.

Neutrality became increasingly difficult for VNPA in the 1990s, commencing with the turmoil that accompanied the fading of the Kirner government in 1990–92. However, the decade is essentially the story of the Liberal Kennett government that came to power in October 1992 and transitioned rapidly from promises to be supportive of environmental issues to a pursuit of policies and actions that increasingly outraged VNPA and other conservationists. In this, the 1990s Liberals were a far cry from the philosophy and progressive stance on environmental matters of some earlier Liberals, notably the government of Dick Hamer in the 1970s.

In May 1995, the relationship with the Kennett government was described in VNPA Council papers as, 'we are being patronised, fobbed off, ignored and lied to'.² There was a particular deterioration after Kennett won the March 1996 election, when over-confidence caused over-reach that contributed to the alienation of Victoria's progressive electorate well beyond environmental matters. This was compounded by the government's dictatorial style, such as amalgamating local government authorities, closing schools and the privatisation and commercialisation of government operations. The Victorian electorate narrowly rejected the Kennett government in October 1999.³

Soon after the Kennett government was first elected in 1992, it became apparent that the attitude of many of its members to the natural environment was essentially focused on how it could be exploited to meet human needs. There was an underlying ideological assumption in this outlook that 'nature' existed (or had been created) for human exploitation and enjoyment, and that its 'resources' were virtually endless. This had been a common attitude in earlier times, but by the late 20th century, it was increasingly under challenge on philosophical as well as practical grounds. There was growing global awareness of the level of human damage to the environment, such as



Camping in Baw Baw National Park, 1990
Barbara Hilling

the disappearance of forests, mounting extinctions and the denuding and pollution of the seas. Such concerns were increasingly accompanied by warnings about 'global warming', or climate change as it became to be known, all of which threatened the future of the planet as we know it.

Human attitudes generally change slowly unless there is a crisis. Although many in the community understood that humans are a part of nature rather than apart from and superior to it, and that there is no economic wellbeing if the environment is degraded, faith in growth economics and development prevailed in Australia in the 1990s and beyond.

In 1992, the Kennett government was welcomed by VNPA with reasonably high hopes, partly because in the lead-up to the election the Shadow Minister, Marie Tehan, had been consultative and had shown support in such matters as strengthening the administration of national parks. Optimism was soon thrown into doubt when, despite previous promises, the Kennett government quickly passed an interim budget containing substantial cuts across public expenditure, including to the National Parks Service. The government also introduced a 'rapid approval process' to speed the way of developments by reducing environmental considerations.

This was a mere foretaste of what was to come, and the challenges of working with the Kennett government continued, and grew, over the years, to the end of the century. Environmental achievements were far fewer than in the previous two decades as VNPA struggled to find common ground with a number of the Ministers in relevant portfolios whose sympathy for, and understanding of environmental issues, was at times in question. They included Mark Birrell as Minister of Conservation and Environment (1992–96), Marie Tehan as Minister for Conservation and Land Management (1996–99), Geoff Coleman as Minister for Natural Resources (1992–96) and Robert Maclellan as Minister for Planning (1992–99).

The VNPA 1997 Annual Report summarised some of the issues that had been faced since the government was returned at the March 1996 election, and had intensified its program of commercialisation and privatisation:

This last year has seen an unprecedented number of attacks on our parks and an increasing push to identify the commercial potential of parks which has meant that VNPA has had a hard year...

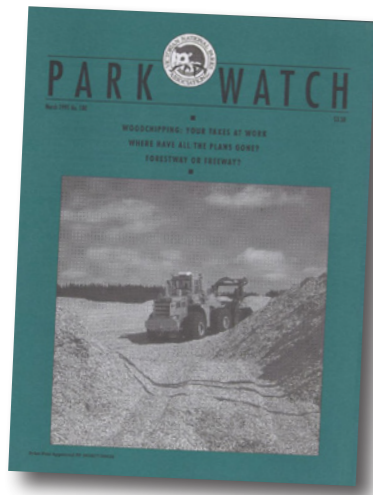
The last twelve months have seen a huge push to commercialise and privatise our parks with major developments planned for Wilsons Promontory National Park,

Stephen Johnston, VNPA President,
1990–93



“

Although there were still obvious gaps in the Victorian park system which needed to be filled, during the decade VNPA was forced to focus significantly on a wider range of challenges to the natural environment in Victoria



Park Watch, issue #180, March 1995

the Great Ocean Road, an unsympathetic redevelopment of the Nobbies at Phillip Island and the release of the Draft Victorian Coastal Strategy, which also encourages development rather than conservation. Tourism is not the only commercial drawcard and we have had to fight several instances of proposed exploitation of natural resources in national parks. The upgrading of Chiltern to National Park status was marred by the decision to allow continued mineral exploration and another year of firewood removal in the area...

VNPA has also been very concerned about several government initiatives introduced with little or no public consultation. In December [1996] the National Parks Service was abolished and a new corporation, Parks Victoria, was formed in its place...

More recently, the Land Conservation Council (LCC) ceased to exist on June 30 1997, following 25 years of developing recommendations on land use in Victoria... the introduction of legislation to abolish the LCC [came] without warning... It remained to be seen how the new Environment Conservation Council [ECC] would perform and what the outcome for conservation would be.⁴

The VNPA Annual Report in 1998 was equally alarming:

This year, our government has continued the push for the commercialisation of our parks system, demonstrated by proposed developments at the Prom, Cape Conran, Port Campbell, the Grampians and the

excision of 285 hectares of the Alpine National Park for commercial interests. The slashing of such a large area of a park represents a dangerous precedent and shows that the government does not understand the intention behind the National Parks Act – that parks are forever.

We have witnessed a \$20 million cut to the Department of Natural Resources and Environment's budget, having major implications for fauna and flora services, research, and the Environment Conservation Council's work.⁵

Compounding the situation was the federal election in 1996 of the Coalition Howard government, which equally put development and exploitation ahead of environmental protection. Over the next decade it emasculated the national protective regimes that had been set up during, and since, the Whitlam era, pushing most heritage responsibilities – natural, Indigenous and historic – back to the states and local government authorities.⁶ As those authorities were seldom willing or equipped to undertake such responsibilities rigorously, it was a bleak period for the environment. The Commonwealth also began the process of winding back and eventually abolishing financial support for community environmental associations such as VNPA.

Doug Humann, the Director for most of the decade, summarises the period as 'tumultuous' and 'like stepping through a minefield.'⁷ It set environmental protection back and created an atmosphere in which VNPA was often forced to be reactive rather than focused on its main ambitions. Nevertheless, the Association continued to provide a wide range of environmental activities and services for its members and maintained strong membership numbers. Ironically, in some ways, it was a successful decade for the organisation because its struggles with the government to preserve the environment won it broader public acknowledgement and support. VNPA also became more professional in its administration and campaigning, employing a greater number of professional campaigners to lead and complement its volunteer workforce, and including more women across all its roles. 🌿

Filling the gaps

Much had been achieved by VNPA, the LCC and Victorian governments from the 1950s to the late 1980s in selecting and reserving areas of conservation significance. In 1990, Victoria could boast 31 national parks totalling 2.28 million ha, or about 10 per cent of the state.⁸ This had been a major achievement for all concerned. However, inevitably, there were still areas of significant natural value that were not covered by any protective status and were under threat.

The VNPA goal was to have parks that covered, or included, all the main types of natural systems in Victoria. The four main gaps that preoccupied VNPA in the 1990s (and beyond) were: the remnant Box-Ironbark woodlands of central Victoria; the heavily forested Central Highlands or Ash Ranges that stretch to the east of Melbourne; the scattering of remnant grasslands across the state; and Victoria's large marine and coastal regions, which were essentially unprotected.

Success in filling the gaps was limited under the Kennett government as, despite its seven and a half years in office, only 127,864 ha was added to Victoria's national park system. This compares with 108,036 ha created between 1882 and 1955, 98,450 ha under Henry Bolte after he initiated the parks system, 781,932 ha under Hamer/Thompson and 1,961,097 ha during the Cain/Kirner years.⁹

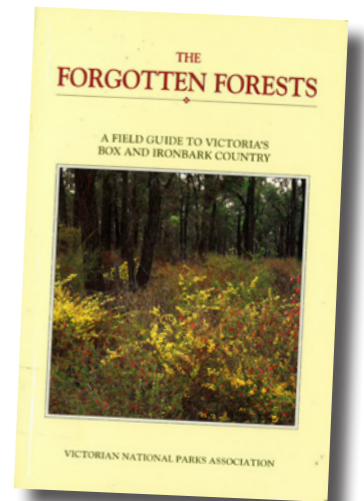
Box-Ironbark Woodlands

'Box-Ironbark woodlands' is a generic term encompassing a range of ecosystems dominated by Box and Ironbark eucalypts that historically stretched across large areas of central Victoria north of the Dividing Range. Much of this overlapped, or was adjacent to, Victoria's auriferous regions, and during the gold rushes of the 1850s and later huge swathes of timber were cleared for mining, construction and firewood, and much land was also cleared for grazing and agriculture.

By the late 20th century, about 85 per cent had been destroyed and most of the severely degraded remnant was in a few small forest areas, notably at Chiltern Regional Park, along roadsides and on private land.¹⁰ These valuable woodlands were a continuing source of a large volume of firewood cutting in Victoria that was denuding the forests, and further threatening already endangered species.

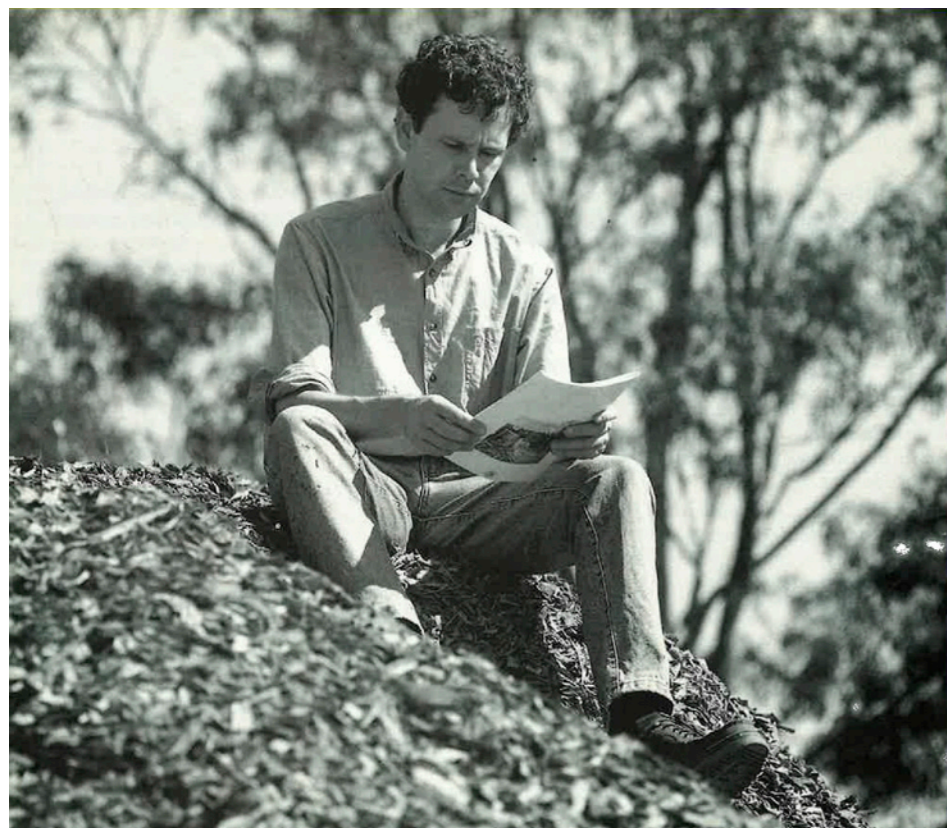
VNPA had long advocated the need for increased protection of these areas in the parks and reserve system, but there was resistance from many in local industries and their communities who sought to continue their exploitation.

The situation became more difficult when, in 1994, legislative changes in planning and in mining regulation, facilitated further encroachment. This resulted in VNPA turning its attention more fully to Box-Ironbark Woodlands in the 1990s. A crafted



The Forgotten Forests: A field guide to Victoria's Box and Ironbark Forests, published by VNPA, 1994

Zoologist and author, Barry Traill, 1995



VNPA walk in Chiltern, 1996





Chiltern State Park
Sean Dooley

the 1995 VNPA Annual Picnic
Doug Humann



name and status changed. At first it was to be the Box-Ironbark National Park, but this aroused spirited opposition as it was viewed as an attempt to give the impression that Chiltern contained all of the Box-Ironbark forest that it was considered necessary to protect. Because of the criticism the declared name became the Chiltern Box-Ironbark National Park. Alarming, mineral exploration would continue and firewood would still be cut.¹³

The LCC had always worked thoroughly and deliberately, and in this case its processes and the preparation of its Descriptive Report dragged on, perhaps partly at the wish of the government, and had not been completed when the LCC was abolished. The replacement ECC took up the process but worked equally slowly. VNPA was increasingly impatient and commented in its 1999 Annual Report:

Securing protection of Victoria's Box Ironbark forests in National Parks is perhaps the most urgent conservation issue VNPA has ever faced. More than 85% of these forests have now been cleared and the health of what little remains continues to deteriorate due to logging, mining and a range of other degrading land uses. In all, more than 150 species dependent on our Box Ironbark forests are threatened with extinction – species such as the Barking Owl, the Regent Honeyeater, the Swift Parrot and the Brush Tailed Phascogale.

During the past year VNPA has continued its ongoing campaign for the urgent protection of these wonderful forests in national parks. VNPA assisted the launch of new conservation groups in Bendigo and Castlemaine – groups formed specifically to fight for Box-Ironbark National Parks – and engaged a consultant to examine the viability of a plantation firewood industry to provide a sustainable alternative to the destruction of these forests for firewood and fenceposts – and ultimately the plethora of species dependent on them.

Literally every tree and every passing day matters in this conservation battle where only [a tiny proportion] of original old growth forest remain and less than 2% of what little remains is currently protected in reserves. This sense of urgency has not however been shared by the state government, which recently announced a further six month delay in the release of the Environment Conservation Council's recommendations for the future of our Box Ironbark forests.¹⁴

The LCC Report had not been released before the government's defeat in 1999 and it was left to a new government in the new century to legislate for protection of Box-Ironbark areas in a mixture of small national and state parks and other protected zones in 2002.

campaign was developed and sustained, led until 1999 by Charlie Sherwin as Rural Projects and Box-Ironbark Campaigner, in conjunction with the VNPA Box-Ironbark Committee, skilfully led by zoologist Barry Traill. They developed innovative campaigns that worked largely through community engagement, educating people about the importance, beauty and benefits of healthy ecosystems. To this end, they established the Box and Ironbark Bush Alliance, a lobbying collective of 38 community groups from across northern Victoria.¹¹

To the delight of VNPA, in late 1995, the Minister for Conservation and Environment, Mark Birrell, announced at the VNPA annual picnic that there would be an LCC study of Box-Ironbark forests and woodlands. Because it would take years before there could be protection, the Association called unsuccessfully for an interim moratorium on destructive activities. There was also concern that in recent years, the LCC had handed down only very limited recommendations.¹²

However, as an interim measure, in 1997, the Chiltern State Park had its

Central Highlands and Yarra Ranges

The Central Highlands and Yarra Ranges are names given to the very large region of hilly and mountainous mature wet and cool temperate eucalypt rainforests that stretches east of Melbourne through, and beyond, the Yarra Valley. Parts had been cleared for mining, timber cutting and agriculture and associated towns since the 19th century, and in the 20th century, small areas in the mountains were set apart for recreational skiing.

The main economic exploitation was by the timber industry, for which the ranges of old growth native forests offered a bonanza for construction timber and wood chips for paper. For many years, opposition from timber cutters and their communities stood in the way of the declaration of substantial protected areas. From 1987, the LCC had been working through its assessment of what it called Melbourne Area, District 2, and finally, in 1993, it produced its long-awaited Proposed Recommendations. VNPA had been advocating a single large park encompassing much of the remaining eucalypt forest.

But the LCC recommendations were deeply disappointing. They included proposals for small areas of new and extended lower-level parks, flora and/or fauna reserves and nature conservation reserves, but the

national park recommendation was pitiful. It would contain a mere 73,560 hectares and would mainly consist of three areas already protected in the closed catchments of the Maroondah, O'Shannassy and Upper Yarra reservoirs.¹⁵

VNPA geared up its campaign and made submissions to try to persuade the LCC and government to expand its proposed national park. Anne Casey was the Central Highlands Project officer and James Ensor was funded with a contribution from the Melbourne Bushwalkers to examine potential national park blocks in detail. However, his comprehensive report and the work by VNPA were to no avail. When the LCC Final Recommendations were released in mid-1994, the proposed Ash Ranges National Park contained only marginal additions. At 75,900 ha, 80 per cent of which was made up of the water catchments, it was only a quarter of what VNPA recommended and left 465,000 ha available for logging.¹⁶

VNPA continued to lobby the government to expand the park, using the theme and brochure title 'A great city deserves a great national park', but the government refused.¹⁷ The very limited and re-named Yarra Ranges National Park was officially opened by Minister Birrell on 15 December 1995.¹⁸

The need for a much more substantial National Park in this area remains unmet.

“

VNPA continued to lobby the government to expand the park, using the theme and brochure title 'A great city deserves a great national park'...

Great Forest National Park brochure



Marine, coastal and fisheries

The Victorian ecosystems that were least protected in the 1990s were also the largest – the foreshores, bays and adjacent seas, or 'Marine, Coastal and Fisheries' as they were generally called. They were some of the most over-exploited regions since European arrival, starting with sealers and whalers early in the 19th century, and followed by extensive fishing (at times over-fishing), various sorts of pollution, and inappropriate development on the shorelines.

Protection and conservation of coastlines and seas had been on VNPA agenda since the 1970s and, although five limited marine parks and reservations been declared in 1986 when Joan Kirner was the Minister, they gave minimal protection. Damaging activities continued and increased – even more fishing, dredging (for scallops and other fishes, as well as for shipping channels), faster coastal

development, the introduction of noxious organisms, especially in ballast water, and other exploitation. VNPA campaigning was extensive throughout the 1990s, but marine parks and protected areas were highly contested by industries and recreational activities that used coastal and marine zones. These included professional fishers, shipping interests, anglers, spearfishers and water skiers.

In 1993, the LCC commenced work on a coastal and marine investigation and VNPA responded by preparing submissions, providing advice, entering negotiations and building a campaign. Much of the work was led by Nicci Tsernjavski, VNPA Marine Projects Officer. VNPA ambitions included the establishment of a system of large and well-protected marine and coastal parks, tighter controls on ballast water treatment, and better and more sustainable fisheries management. However, the LCC interim recommendations in April 1995



Bastion Point, Croajingolong National Park

Australian Fur Seal,
Wilson's Promontory National Park
Parks Victoria



were profoundly disappointing. Nicci Tsernjavski summarised VNPA response: *The LCC Marine and Coastal Proposed Recommendations... fail dismally to make recommendations that will result in the long-term protection of Victoria's marine environment. Only 1.4% of Victoria's coastal waters are recommended as Sanctuary Areas and these areas allow for the possible removal of marine biota for restocking other areas. The report also recommends that all existing MEPAs be downgraded and regulations be left up to the discretion of the Department of Conservation and Natural Resources. Other areas called Marine Parks may allow for oil, gas and mineral extraction, aquaculture and various other forms of commercial fishing.*¹⁹

VNPA renewed its efforts, with most attention focused on working with the LCC in the hope of better Final Recommendations. Nicci Tsernjavski left in 1996, and was replaced by Kate Brent, who continued the marine campaign.²⁰ VNPA also undertook to co-host the Victorian Coordinator of the National Marine and Coastal Community Network, Tim Allen, in its office. In 1996, as the major Victorian environmental group working on marine protection, VNPA was appointed through legislation to represent conservationists in Fisheries matters.²¹ As part of his outreach to the community, Tim Allen had a regular radio spot on RRR-FM, *Radio Marinara*.

Despite all this work, and after five years of investigation, when the LCC was suddenly abolished after the 1996 election (to the applause of the fishing industry) the government refused to release its Final Recommendations.²² There were even rumours that Minister Tehan's motive in acting so quickly and secretly to abolish the LCC, was concern that the recommendations were to establish new marine parks and ban fishing in some areas.²³ The

LCC's replacement, the Environment Conservation Council (ECC), was directed to undertake a revised Marine, Coastal and Estuarine Study, but its terms of reference were very limited and, in the view of VNPA, gave priority to fish farming rather than protection. During 1997–98, VNPA worked with the ECC to achieve a good outcome.²⁴

Meanwhile, VNPA message was spread by a new publication, *National Parks: Beyond the Shore*, and a series of public meetings to raise community awareness and appreciation of the need for marine parks and reserves.²⁵ Because of a lack of funding, Kate Brent left VNPA in 1997, but was able to return in 1998 in the new position of Fisheries Officer.²⁶ This reflected the divergence of marine campaigning into two separate areas, one for general marine, and the other specifically relating to fisheries matters.

The ECC Marine, Estuarine and Coastal interim report was tabled in March 1998, but its recommendations were limited and related mainly to the establishment of a Port Phillip Heads Marine Park, with some provisions for marine aquaculture, including in Port Phillip Bay. There was immediate opposition from the fishing industry and groups such as recreational anglers. In the face of such public furor, the marine park proposal was rejected by Cabinet, explaining it in terms of its potential impact on shipping. Tehan sent the report back to the ECC for further review.²⁷

Out of the blue, two weeks before the September 1999 election, the Premier announced that a Marine Park in part of Port Phillip Bay would go ahead, but VNPA realised that it would be multiple use, so most existing activities would continue. Marine and coastal issues were left dangling when the government suffered a surprise defeat at the election.²⁸ This vital set of ecosystems would remain unprotected into the new century.



Plains Wandering: Exploring the grassy plains of south-eastern Australia, by Ian Lunt, Tim Barlow and James Ross, 1998

Grasslands

Another ecosystem in Victoria that had been long neglected were the grasslands. By the second half of the 20th century there were only remnants of the many regions of grassland ecological communities, largely created and maintained by Aboriginal burning practices, and which had previously covered substantial areas of Victoria. These included areas near Melbourne where they were quickly disappearing under houses and roads, or elsewhere, where they were being cleared for agricultural and other commercial purposes.

In the 1980s, VNPA had commenced to campaign for the protection of some of Victoria's native grasslands, its almost sole success being the creation of the small Terrick Terrick State Park west of Echuca. With only 0.1 per cent of original grassland ecosystems surviving, concern for grasslands continued through the 1990s as one of the four main gaps that needed filling.

VNPA maintained a consistent grasslands campaign, running up against indifference (because the ecological value of grasslands was seldom recognised) and resistance (because of the value of the land for other

purposes). Much of VNPA's campaign work, until he left in 1997, was led by James Ross, who represented VNPA on the Roadsides Conservation Advisory Committee, Greening Australia's Urban Advisory Committee and the Recovery Teams for the Striped Legless Lizard and Southern Lined Earless Dragon. In 1998, VNPA published *Plains Wandering: Exploring the grassy plains of south-eastern Australia*, by Ian Lunt, Tim Barlow and James Ross. Some of the grasslands work was later taken over by Tim Barlow.

Through these campaigns, there was a slow rise in public appreciation of grasslands and the establishment of local groups which identified and sought to protect grasslands in their region, such as in the Merri Creek Valley. By 1995, there was some optimism that the government and LCC might respond, and that a number of remnant areas might be acquired for reserves, such as Craigieburn, Cressy and Terrick Terrick, but most fell through.²⁹ Finally, in 1997, 1277 ha of privately owned grassland at Terrick Terrick was acquired and added to the existing 2493 ha State Park, which in 1999, was declared Terrick Terrick National Park.³⁰

Otherwise, grasslands remained mainly under threat of oblivion. 🌿

Defending what had been won

Overwhelmingly, during the Kennett years of 1992–99, VNPA was forced to take a stance to prevent losses in issues that had been won in previous decades. The Kennett government appears to have interpreted its win in 1996, as providing electoral approval for the imposition of a further range of contentious policies, and this resulted in a spate of alarming actions.

For VNPA, there were three in particular that were announced in the months after the election: the commercialisation and privatisation of aspects of national parks – notably intrusive developments in Wilsons Promontory National Park; skiing developments in the Alps that impinged on the Alpine National Park; and ongoing changes to the bureaucratic administration and selection of national parks. In early 1997, VNPA and the environment movement were under siege. But community anger was building and this led to several environmental organisations forming an alliance, 'Hands Off Our Parks!' (HOOP), which brought 3,000 protestors to a Carlton Gardens rally on 23 February.³¹ VNPA played a leading role in HOOP, which continued to be central in the coming fights to resist encroachments of commercial and inappropriate developments in Victoria's parks.

Underlying the tensions of these years, were two ideological differences between VNPA and the neoliberal government. One was the divergence in the conceptual purpose of parks and of the role that should be played by governments in protecting them. Government members and some senior bureaucrats were apparently of the view that the principal uses of national parks should be human enjoyment and recreation, rather than the protection of nature.

The second difference was the belief in small government, private enterprise and market forces which underpinned the proposed changes to the character of parks by advocating privately-operated profit-driven facilities within them for tourist recreation. Handing over much of the running of parts of the parks to private enterprise would, it was believed, serve the triple purpose of facilitating recreational facilities for the public, providing an economic return and reducing government responsibility.

As a result, VNPA was forced to devote significant time and resources to resisting this disturbing trend, such as

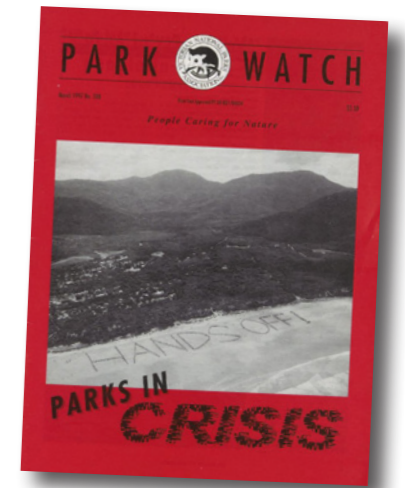
mounting campaigns, lobbying, producing publications, making submissions and seeking media attention. VNPA staff worked long and hard. In 1998, the Association employed Leslie Sorenson as National Parks Project Officer to write a policy on 'Appropriate Use of Parks', which provided a framework for VNPA to deal with issues such as commercial developments. It became a valuable tool with which to engage and try to influence the government, Parks Victoria and the public.³²

Wilson's Promontory National Park

After the 1996 election, Wilsons Promontory National Park, in many respects the flagship of the Victorian park system, was increasingly a source of major aggravation for VNPA because of government proposals for extensive development, much of which was to be in private hands. This took the form of broadening the capacity of the park to host and entertain a range of 'tourists' rather than traditional campers and bushwalkers. While VNPA supported the popularising of national parks, it believed that this should only be done in a way that was sympathetic to the original purposes of the park, which meant putting nature first and keeping development to a minimum. Large-scale accommodation and other facilities were acceptable, but only if they were constructed outside the parks.

In November 1996, the government announced plans for the development of a 150-bed three star licensed 'lodge' (a commercial operation) at Tidal River, a 45-bed guided walkers' lodge in a remote area of the Prom, the construction of new walking tracks serviced by commercial huts or tents and the possibility of a road to the lighthouse. VNPA responded immediately, on 1 December, launching at Storey Hall in front of 800 people, what became perhaps its most famous campaign – 'Hands Off the Prom'. The meeting concluded with the performance of a specially composed song of the same name.³³ The need to continually fight for the Prom, now approaching the centenary of its declaration, was described by Ros Garnet as 'a 100 Years War'.³⁴

VNPA moved into gear, appointing Karen Alexander to manage the campaign. Doug Humann undertook numerous media interviews and wrote articles for *Park Watch*



Park Watch, issue #188, March 1997

Terrick Terrick National Park
Daniel Kirby/flickr



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The need to continually fight for the Prom, now approaching the centenary of its declaration, was described by Ros Garnet as 'a 100 Years War'.



including 'Parks or Profit?' and 'Parks in Crisis and People in Action'. There followed an immediate public response which over the summer of 1996–97, received a great deal of media attention and sympathy. The public reaction against the proposals was shown by 3,238 public submissions being made against the draft plans despite a short cut-off period which Minister Tehan refused to extend. Many public figures, including former environment ministers Bill Borthwick and Joan Kirner, expressed their opposition. Especially effective was Karen Alexander's innovative idea to have volunteers gather on the Tidal River beach on 29 December, where 2,000 people shaped themselves into the words 'Hands Off!', to be photographed from the air.³⁵

Whether it was because of this public outcry, or doubts about its economic viability as he claimed, or concern about an approaching by-election in Gippsland West on 1 February (won by Independent Susan Davies), on 17 January, Premier Jeff Kennett stepped back from the proposed 150 bed lodge. Nevertheless, he made it clear that the other commercial developments, vehicle tracks and large walking trails were intended to proceed. A new management plan incorporating these changes was prepared.³⁶ Despite claims of 'extensive community consultation', VNPA was denied access to the Minister and other opportunities

to discuss the Prom plans with officials. A petition to Parliament was initiated by VNPA, which gathered 45,368 signatures, but Minister Tehan refused to accept it or even nominate a colleague to receive it, so it was handed to Independent MP, Russell Savage.³⁷

When the new Prom management plan was published in July 1997, it reinforced the sense of dismay. While there were some good proposals for aspects relating to conservation measures, it was mostly bad news, including: a 45-bed privately owned exclusive cabin complex at Tidal River; a lodge on the track to the lighthouse; a new Great Prom Walk Track to be carved through bush and wilderness; and an expansion of the area for development at Tidal River. As one of his last acts before leaving VNPA, Doug Humann wrote:

With these privately funded commercial developments at the Prom, Victoria's park system will have lost its innocence from the world of crass commercialism. These developments expose all parks and wilderness areas in Victoria to inappropriate developments. If they can happen at a place so cherished by Victorians as the Prom, no park or wilderness in the state is safe...

No, this is about a government prepared to sacrifice Victoria's premier national park and the integrity of the whole park system on an ideologically-driven agenda to allow private

*enterprise the opportunity to establish wherever profit can be made.*³⁸

Over the following months, Parks Victoria began a range of apparently acceptable lower-level improvements to visitor facilities, walking tracks and environmental efficiency.³⁹ However, in April 1998, further expansions to car parks, accommodation and service facilities were announced, which VNPA regarded suspiciously as 'incremental development'.⁴⁰

In the light of these ongoing concerns, on 28 June 1998, VNPA relaunched the 'Hands Off the Prom!' campaign at Lilly Pilly Gully in the Prom, attended by a rally of 800 people. Sherryl Garbutt, the Opposition Shadow Minister, promised that in government, Labor would not allow further private commercial development. The protest was a big success and attracted much media attention.⁴¹

As part of the new campaign, VNPA, together with the Federation of Victorian Walking Clubs and some Gippsland conservation groups, prepared an alternative Management Plan for the Prom. It was 'based on the principle that human activities must not compromise the primary purpose—nature conservation.' The Plan was then carried from Tidal River on a 'Really Great Prom Walk' (an ironic allusion to the government's proposed 'Great Prom Walk') between 15–29 November,

from Tidal River to Parliament House in Melbourne. Some 2,000 people gathered on the steps to welcome the strategy plan and see it handed to Sherryl Garbutt and the Independent MP for Gippsland West, Susan Davies. Minister Tehan was unavailable.⁴²

Wilson's Promontory National Park reached its centenary in July 1999 with the threat of major development still hanging over it as the government continued to express determination to proceed with its development and commercialisation. However, with an election drawing near, and Labor promising to reverse the Prom and other government decisions, the issue was quietly allowed to go off the boil. Sensing the direction these matters were taking, the commercial operator of the proposed walking tours and accommodation facilities withdrew his interest, admitting that he had underestimated the extent to which Victorians were opposed to the commercial exploitation of parks.⁴³

With the election of the Labor government in October 1999, there was a huge sense of relief about the Prom and other issues. Sherryl Garbutt had worked hard to win over the conservationists and her elevation to be the new Minister was highly welcome. There was, however, a tinge of caution as expectations had been disappointed before.

Two thousand people form the words 'Hands Off' on the beach at Tidal River, Wilson's Promontory National Park, 29 December 1996
Jerry Galea, courtesy The Age

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Out of the blue, early in 1994 the head of the ARC [Alpine Resorts Commission] made a public announcement ...that Mt Stirling was to be developed as a fully-functioning ski field with facilities including accommodation, and would be linked by cable car to the Mt Buller resort.

The Alps and the Alpine National Park

In 1996, Victoria entered the longest period of drought and high temperatures since official records began, which lasted until 2009.⁴⁴ While there were some who attempted to deny the science that this was most likely caused by, and was a preliminary experience of, climate change, in the conservation community there was mounting alarm at the impact that this would have on fragile ecosystems. A particular focus of concern was the state's Alpine regions, which were already under the onslaught of clearing, logging, 4WD and bush bikes, cattle grazing and the development of ski resorts. Some dire predictions threw doubt on the viability of skiing within the following years because of the decline in snowfalls.

Nevertheless, eternal vigilance was needed to protect the hard-won Alpine National Park against these damaging encroachments into the Alps. The most dramatic new threats were generated by pressure to expand and service ski resorts, notably a new resort at Mt Stirling, and the excision of land from the Alpine National Park to add to the Falls Creek resort.

From early 1993, VNPA was expressing concern about development creep in the Alpine National Park and adjacent regions, such as underground cables and destructive ski slope works. One focus of concern was Mt Stirling near Mt Buller which had become a site for cross-country and downhill skiing, but with little infrastructure. The region was outside, but close to, the Alpine National Park, and was environmentally sensitive. In 1984, the Cain government had announced a \$100 million resort development for the site, but the

project did not advance until 1989, when Minister Steve Crabb called for tenders. It was dropped in the following year because of a lack of private investor interest.

After the Kennett government came to power, there were behind-the-scenes negotiations about the development of Mt Stirling between the government, the Alpine Resorts Commission (ARC) and the Grollo Group, which in 1992, took over Buller Ski Lifts. Out of the blue, early in 1994, the head of the ARC made a public announcement in the name of Minister Coleman that Mt Stirling was to be developed as a fully-functioning ski field with facilities including accommodation, and would be linked by cable car to the Mt Buller resort. A contract to enable the development to commence was about to be signed even though there had been no public consultation. Nor had there been an environmental assessment, despite the fact that it would involve extensive land clearing and intrusive infrastructure in a relatively pristine region.⁴⁵ Under the headline 'Mt Stirling Madness!' VNPA Newsletter commented in April:

The conservation movement has been rocked by a number of decisions by the Kennett government in the last few months, with major changes to planning and mining legislation, and a myriad of smaller decisions or actions/inactions which have, or are likely to have, an impact on conservation values.

Mt Stirling is one of a number of major issues to face us now and forces us to evaluate the approach of the Kennett government.⁴⁶

There was a public outcry against the development, especially as suspicion grew about the motives and activities of the ARC, which was a statutory commission responsible for Victoria's resorts and skiing facilities at Mt Hotham, Falls Creek, Mt Buller, Mt Stirling, Mt Baw Baw, Lake Mountain, Mt Donna Buang and Mt Torbreck. It gradually became known that the ARC had been working secretly with Grollo, and that the company was expecting significant financial incentives to undertake the project. To many in the conservation world, and to some in government, the ARC came to be seen in the next few months as a rogue authority, somewhat out of control.

Following the initial announcement, and with only two days' notice, VNPA called a public protest meeting that was attended by 300 people. A group of environmentalists took the ARC to court and obtained an order not to proceed, and the issue was then taken out of the hands of the Minister for Natural Resources and given to the Department of Planning to conduct an Environmental Effects Statement (EES). VNPA was represented on the formal EES consultative committee.⁴⁷



Alpine Tree Frog
Peter Robinson

A review of the ARC was also instituted, to which VNPA made a submission, stating: 'Our experience is that the ARC is an agency that is held in widespread disrepute by many Victorians for its negligent practices, including many people who use resorts, or work in them.'⁴⁸ In October 1994, the review produced a highly critical report,⁴⁹ and in the following March, the government discontinued the membership of the entire ARC panel, and appointed new commissioners.

Nevertheless, the threat to Mt Stirling remained, and in July 1995, VNPA Newsletter commented:

Again, we ask the question - who wants development at Mt Stirling? Virtually nobody excepting a few key Mt Buller ski and commercial interests, the ARC ... and a minority of government politicians and bureaucrats. The vast majority of the informed and concerned Victorian public, it would seem, are opposed to the downhill ski development of the mountain.⁵⁰

As the March 1996 state election approached, there was mounting fear in the community that if the government won it would sell off the state's ski resorts to private interests. After the government was returned, it did not immediately act,⁵¹ but because of community anger Grollo abandoned its role in the project in June 1996. VNPA maintained its public campaign

and worked with the EES consultants to try to inform and shape the recommendations.

Assisted by a contribution from Melbourne Bushwalkers, VNPA was able to employ Rod Waterman to focus broadly on defence of the Alps, and specifically on the Mt Stirling threat. An appeal was organised for funds to 'Elp save an Alp' and a statewide coalition of community groups came together to oppose the project.

In June 1996, the interim EES was released, eliciting over 600 submissions in response. The final report, given to Minister Maclellan in December, recommended against the ski resort at Mt Stirling because of the environmental damage it would bring. Early in 1997, the government announced that it would not proceed, and instead promised a fifteen-year moratorium. There was much celebrating in VNPA and among those who loved the Alpine National Park.⁵² However, the encroachment of developments close to the park would be a source of ongoing concern.⁵³

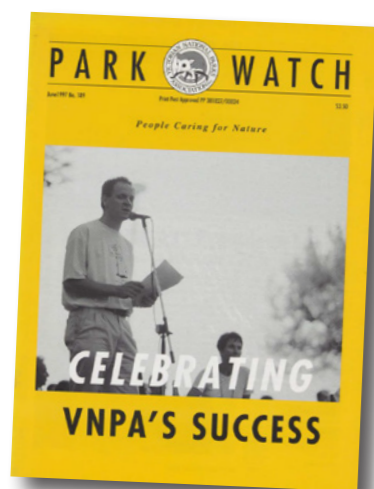
As a postscript to the Mt Stirling issue, on 30 April 1998, the ARC was abolished and was succeeded by a much less significant body, the Alpine Resorts Coordinating Council. The actual administration of the resorts became the responsibility of five individual Alpine Resort Management Boards.

Damage caused by cattle, near Johnston's Hut, Mt Bogong, Alpine National Park, March 1990
Graham Wills-Johnson



Tim O'Hara, VNPA President, 1993-95





Park Watch, issue #189, JUNE 1997

Just as the Mt Stirling threat was being seen off, there was another attack on protection of the Alps, this time within the National Park. Late in 1997, VNPA discovered that, without consultation or advice from the National Parks Advisory Council or the Environment Conservation Council, the government had decided to excise 285 ha at Mt McKay from the Alpine National Park, and incorporate it into the Falls Creek Alpine Resort. Not only would this result in severe degradation within the Park area, and in a management zone for the endangered Mountain Pygmy Possum where only small numbers were thought to survive, it would establish a precedent for removal of land from a National Park. It also became known that Minister Tehan had supported the excision against the advice of the Director of National Parks.⁵⁴

VNPA immediately launched yet another campaign and 400 people attended a protest meeting. However, the excision Bill was quickly passed through the parliament, setting what VNPA described as a 'deplorable precedent'. The Minister even decided initially to proceed with the project without an EES, but under pressure a Technical Advisory Group was

established to undertake an assessment. VNPA maintained its rage and protests but was unable to reverse the government decision.⁵⁵

Another significant concern was cattle grazing in the Alps. Despite extensive scientific evidence about the damage done by the grazing during summer months in the Alps and the national park, the practice continued throughout the 1990s. The Mountain Cattlemen had won a major political victory in 1986, and in 1991, the Kirner government acquiesced and reissued licences for seven years in most existing areas. VNPA maintained a steady stream of protest activity during the 1990s, building in intensity as time for renewal approached in 1998, but Kennett government sympathies were clearly with the cattlemen.

In a clever manoeuvre, VNPA organised private funding to purchase the licences so that the cattle could be removed. However, the government ignored the offer and renewed the licences to the existing holders for 9000 cattle to be grazed in the alpine area.⁵⁶ This was another issue that would drag into the 21st century. 🌿



Government administration

One of the first actions of the incoming Kennett government in 1992, was a minor restructure of the Department of Conservation and Environment including the transfer away of the responsibility for the Land Conservation Council (LCC) to the Minister for Planning. The modified department was named the Department of Conservation and Natural Resources. Both of these changes, perhaps not fully recognised immediately, were indicative of a very different attitude towards conservation and the environment. First, the work of the LCC was now perceived as a planning matter, not a scientific analysis of land use aimed at defining those areas deserving of conservation protection. As well, the change of 'environment' to 'natural resources' in the title of the revamped department was indicative of a perception of the environment which commodified it and broke it down into elements that were assumed to be available for economic exploitation.

Another emerging development under the new government, with great impact across the Victoria public service, including environmental administration, was the its neoliberal belief in small government and the trend during the 1990s to reduce and corporatise the public service. Often, this involved amalgamation of departments and agencies into large units, with leadership roles frequently given to experienced administrators rather than people with relevant professional and technical expertise. As the 1990s advanced, the outsourcing of public service roles to consultants and private bodies, together with a privatisation program, seriously eroded the size and capacity of the public service, notably including the administration of national parks.⁵⁷

These trends impacted on environmental administration and the work of VNPA, and during the 1990s, there was a mounting sense of threat to the administrative systems that VNPA had lobbied so hard to achieve and support. In essence, this came down to two particular issues. The first was the system that had been established to assess public land and to ensure that ecosystems worthy of conservation were identified and protected. Since 1971, this process had been conducted by the LCC and was a responsibility of government authorities and administrators. The role of VNPA since the 1950s, and prior to the LCC, had been to advise and to provide

expertise in the processes. Among its staff, members and volunteers, VNPA had a broad range of scientific and technical expertise that meant it had been able to make a significant and respected contribution to LCC and government assessments and decisions. Where it was believed necessary, VNPA was not fearful of asserting appropriate criticism or being resistant. However, in the 1990s, there was increasing ministerial control over these processes and external expertise was diluted. Eventually the LCC was replaced with the more compliant Environment Conservation Council (ECC).

The other challenge was VNPA expectation that Victoria should have an independent National Parks Service (NPS) that was well-funded and well-staffed with people with appropriate expertise, to ensure the wellbeing of national parks and other protected areas. As outlined in Chapter 4, at the start of the 1990s, Labor Minister Steve Crabb proposed significant and unwelcome changes to government administration of the environment, including a restructuring of the NPS that conservationists feared would seriously erode its capacity to be fit for purpose.

The Liberals countered in their election policy in 1992 by committing to strengthen the NPS along the lines that had long been sought by VNPA. Once elected, the new government asked the LCC to report on the best way to provide departmental and national parks services. VNPA was involved in the LCC study, represented by James Ensor. However, most fears were temporarily alleviated when it was recommended that there be a specialist NPS under a largely-independent Director and which would have a clearer structure for rangers. VNPA had some concerns about aspects of the associated new departmental structure, notably the division of the NPS into five Areas each under their own Manager, but these concerns were minor.⁵⁸

Over the next three years, VNPA continued to monitor the changes to the NPS and the department, and was particularly concerned about inadequate resourcing, the failure to produce and update management plans for all the parks, poor environmental monitoring, and the push to see parks primarily as sites for tourism.⁵⁹

Meanwhile, the LCC was also experiencing difficulties working within the new administration. From most perspectives, the LCC had done an effective job since



Anne Casey, VNPA President 1995-98
John Deininger

“

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The ECC [Environment Conservation Council] may not have turned out to be the evil arm of an anti-conservation government that was feared, but it showed distinct limitations in its short history.

its establishment in 1970–71, assessing public land and recommending categories for future uses. Because there were always conflicting interest groups, from conservationists to various types of economic exploitation, it was impossible to satisfy everyone. With hindsight, it might be argued that the use of the term ‘conservation’ in the title was an aspiration of its founders rather than the reality of its achievements, but LCC recommendations had nevertheless resulted in substantial swathes of ecosystems being folded into various forms of protection, including national parks at the summit. It was generally felt that the relatively large body of public servants and community representatives who made up the LCC had worked together quite satisfactorily. Clearly, one virtue was the fact that the LCC was essentially, although not totally, independent of government or ministerial direction.

However, from 1993 there was more government intervention in the LCC, and considerable suspicion that since the creation of the large Department of Conservation and Natural Resources, all the public service members had become employees of the one department and might be taking orders from the top. Besides, times were changing and the LCC model did not fit with the corporate philosophy of government administration espoused by the Liberals. As Danielle Clode explains in her history of the LCC:

Everyday ‘government’ by public servants was reduced in favour of greatly increasing the power of executive government. Departments’ staff numbers were slashed, and their work largely outsourced. Semi-autonomous and autonomous bodies like the LCC were routinely restructured to suit the new economic and ideological interests.

*... Institutional history, resident in long-term staff, was eroded, and the knowledge base of departments declined. With management skills given priority over knowledge-based experience, departmental heads were rarely experts in their field. Knowledge and expertise were effectively demoted to more junior levels of the public-service hierarchy. Changes like these eroded the effectiveness of the LCC.*⁶⁰

Quick shocks followed the 1996 re-election of the Kennett government. Within weeks, it had announced the establishment of a mega-department of Natural Resources and Environment housing several ministerial portfolios. One of these was Marie Tehan as Minister for Conservation and Land Management, responsible for national parks, flora and fauna, forests, alpine resorts and the LCC (which for the last few years had been in Planning).⁶¹ In themselves, these changes were not

threatening, but they indicated a further scaling-down of the importance of parks and protected areas, and caused alarm that the knowledge of how to run a National Parks Service was being dissipated.

Worse was to come when Tehan made two sudden moves that transformed conservation assessment and administration and consolidated power and decision making upward to the Minister and the upper levels of the public service, where responsibility would lie with administrators with less expertise and understanding of conservation. The first shock was on 12 December 1996, when, without warning or consultation, Tehan announced the abolition of the NPS and the transfer of its functions to a newly-created entity, Parks Victoria, which was an amalgamation of the NPS and Melbourne Parks and Waterways. Whereas the government proclaimed this as a better way to provide services and manage the parks system, Doug Humann and VNPA saw things differently:

Parks Victoria is essentially Melbourne Parks and Waterways – the parks authority that brought the Grand Prix to Albert Park. It has the same management structure, appearance and Head Office location as Melbourne Parks and Waterways.

*Melbourne Parks and Waterways has not been running parks principally for nature conservation. This is what a National Parks service should do. The steady loss of nature conservation expertise and empathy which has occurred in the conservation department since the early 1990s has now culminated in the emasculation of the role of Director of National Parks. The clock has turned back a decade to tried and failed management practices.*⁶²

The second bombshell was in May 1997, when a Bill was rushed into parliament to abolish the LCC and replace it with the ECC, which would have a generally similar role, but would be much smaller. Its three part-time members would be chosen by the Minister and be under close ministerial direction regarding the investigations they could undertake, about the pace of progress, and what could be done with their recommendations.⁶³ There was also a change in emphasis in what the ECC’s priorities would be, which was a direct reflection of the Kennett government’s ideology, as Clode points out:

The LCC legislation clearly emphasised the importance of environmental preservation and the creation of a variety of parks and reserves. The social and economic implications of land use recommendations were also to be considered, almost as an afterthought. By contrast, the ECC legislation listed issues of economics and development before issues of environmental protection

*and conservation. The fact that ‘the need to protect and conserve biodiversity’ came last in the list of concerns may not have been a deliberate attempt to lower its priority, but was interpreted by some to reflect a change in focus.*⁶⁴

Part of the distress in conservation circles caused by the sudden abolition of the LCC was that, after six years of work, the Final Recommendations of the Marine and Coastal Study were ready but had not been released, and their future was now in doubt. Similarly, the future of the drawn-out Box-Ironbark review was thrown into question.

The ECC may not have turned out to be the evil arm of an anti-conservation government that was feared, but it showed distinct limitations in its short history. It was directed to take on far fewer assessments than its predecessor, its resources were limited, its processes attenuated and its recommendations generally disappointing to VNPA.⁶⁵ The Marine and Coastal and Box-Ironbark assessments, discussed earlier, were the main manifestations of this disappointment.

However, the ECC would not survive the next change of government.

Other issues

There was a mounting awareness in the 1990s that the role of VNPA needed to be more than the establishment and defence of a park system, and that the conservation of nature required a much broader vision and activism. As well as the major campaigns outlined above, VNPA was consequently involved in numerous smaller campaigns and statewide ecological issues.

These included a regular flow of articles on such matters in *Park Watch* and the *Newsletter*. In brief, some of these were:

- Opposition to the expansion of mining into State Parks and other areas that lacked full protection.
- Advocating the need for better fire management. Jenny Barnett’s efforts in this area were instrumental in the Department of Conservation and Natural Resources preparing a Code of Practice.
- Opposition to the extension of woodchipping of native forests and involvement in the convoluted and controversial development of Regional Forest Agreements.
- Concerns about the ineffective administration of the Flora and Fauna Guarantee legislation.
- Responses to diverse and ongoing threats to endangered species including the Mountain Pygmy-possum and the Swift Parrot.

- Opposition to the tourist development, privatisation of facilities and other threats to the Grampians (Gariwerd) National Park, similar to, but not on the scale as, Wilsons Promontory.
- Discussion of developments around the Nobbies on Phillip Island to cater for tourist viewing of the penguins.
- Concerns about the provision of tourist facilities at Port Campbell on the Great Ocean Road.
- Protests about the threat to move the Melbourne chemical storage from Coode Island to Point Lillias, near the RAMSAR wetland site. This was finally defeated.
- A campaign to have ten former Commonwealth-owned lighthouses, that were transferred to the Victorian government, incorporated into the national parks system and not devolved to private enterprise.⁶⁶
- Opposition to firewood cutting in the Barmah and other state forests.
- Advocating the abolition of duck hunting.
- Resisting the encroachment of four-wheel drive vehicles, mountain bike riding and trail bike riding into environmentally sensitive areas.
- Recommendations about the control of feral species. 🐾



Swift Parrot

Marie Tehan, Minister for Conservation and Land Management, 1996–99, addressing the 1997 VNPA conference



Report in *The Age*, 1 Nov 1997

No new national parks for Victoria

Tim Winkler
environment reporter

The State Government has ruled out establishing any more major national parks — apart from marine parks — in Victoria.

The decision comes as the state prepares to celebrate the centenary of its first national park, Wilsons Promontory, next July.

The executive director of parks, flora and fauna, Mr Mark Stone, told a Victorian National Parks Association conference this week that some unprotected areas would be added to existing national parks as a result of the regional forest agreement, but the State Government now looked to private landowners and non-government organisations to preserve important habitats.

Mr Stone said the Government believed that with four million hectares of land protected by national parks and reserves, more big parks were not required.

“The Land Conservation Council has been right across the state and there’s only a finite amount of land in Victoria. The broadacre naming of parks has been done,” he said.

Mr Stone said there were not enough grasslands and box ironbark woodlands in the reserve system, which aims to protect at least 15 per cent of the state’s vegetation types, but the Government was looking to organisations such as the Trust for Nature and the Australian Bush Heritage Fund to protect such areas.

The Government also wanted to increase the scope of the Land for Wildlife scheme, which currently involves 4000 private landowners managing 120,000 hectares in environmentally sustainable ways. Other schemes, such as Landcare and Bushcare were also helping to improve the landscape.

While the Government expected an increase in private reserves, it would not contemplate selling existing national parks, he said, adding that the current park system encompassed the jewels in Victoria’s natural crown.

Conservation groups said they were shocked by Mr Stone’s comments. The new head of the Australian Bush Heritage Fund and former Victorian National Parks Association director, Mr Doug Humann, said the fund owned seven properties across Australia and was seeking land in Victoria. However, the task of preserving box ironbark woodlands and grasslands could not be left to private landowners.

“There are gaps in the public land estate that need to be filled,” he said. “It’s concerning that the director of parks should not see the opportunity to prevent extinctions of flora and fauna.”

Native grassland used to cover a third of the state, but only 0.1 per cent remains, with about 1000 hectares under Government protection. Conservationists believe all remaining grasslands need to be protected to prevent extinctions of flora and fauna.

Box-Ironbark Forest
Parks and conservation areas

People, achievements and activities



Park Watch, issue #191, December 1997

In October 1997, VNPA held one of its most significant conferences, with the title 'Victoria's National Parks: the Next Century'. The conference brought together an impressive range of politicians (from both sides), scientists and environmental activists to analyse the current situation, and to try to set out a path for the future of national parks.

Clearly, an underlying motivation for the conference was the negative political atmosphere in which conservationists found themselves, with VNPA seeking to reclaim momentum and to assert a refreshed motivation. The conference began with a stirring video message by J. Ros Garnet from his hospital bed and concluded with the agreement to a Vision Statement drawn from the conference discussions by Malcolm Calder.

The conference and the Vision Statement⁶⁷ were a rallying call to VNPA members and supporters, and to the Victorian community, at a difficult time. It was carefully crafted not to be too overtly critical of contemporary politicians while setting out a desired future path. It was another example of the balancing act that faced VNPA in its relationship with government, between critical advocacy and positive cooperation.

As a Not-for-profit business, VNPA can only survive and prosper if it garners three things – enthusiastic and generous members/supporters, skilled staff and a steady income flow (ideally with input from government as well as private donors and grants from foundations). Fortunately, the three tend to go together and in the stressful times of the 1990s, the Association was generally well-served.

Partly because of these external stresses, but equally because society was changing, VNPA adjusted and modified to meet contemporary operational requirements. Quite noticeably, the Council and its members took on more of an umbrella administrative and financial role, devolving activities and campaigns more to staff and volunteers. To maintain the organisation's effectiveness, Council undertook periodic reviews of operations and administration. In 1994–95, under the theme 'VNPA at the Crossroads', and again in 1997–98, a good deal of Council time was devoted to the development of new strategy/business plans which refined the organisation's goals, philosophy and methodology.⁶⁸

At the 1996 AGM, changes were made to the Rules of Association which reduced

VISION STATEMENT, 1997

We must look to the future protection and care of Victoria's natural heritage and biodiversity.

This stewardship must spring from an uncompromising commitment by governments to a strong National Parks Act and from an educated community expecting effective management.

To achieve this we need:

- Strong legislation as a primary objective.
- Acceptance of the intrinsic values of natural heritage.
- Effective community involvement.
- Government support (forward budgeting on a triennial basis).
- Effective research and planning.
- Open planning.
- Development strategies and management actions to meet community needs (for example, alternative attractions for recreational use near centres of population).
- Strong formal and informal education.
- Indigenous involvement in park management.
- Recognition of the internationality of Victoria's national parks system.

the number of Councillors to 12 elected and two co-opted. Interestingly, as part of this change, it was decided that employees could no longer be members of Council, which had been an unorthodox arrangement that was allowed in previous years. Even so, some people moved between being staff and Councillors at different times, such as Anne Casey, James Ensor, Jenny Barnett and Phil Ingamells.

Council membership was generally stable, with a core group who served for many years and rotated executive positions (notably vice presidencies) between them. The presidents were Stephen Johnston to the September AGM in 1993, Tim O'Hara 1993–95, Anne Casey 1995–98, and James Ensor from 1998. Long-term Councillors in the 1990s included Jenny Barnett, Joan Lindros, Anne Casey, Janet Coveney, Geoff Durham, Eric Quinlan, James Ensor, James Ross, Deirdre Slattery and Nicci Tsernjavski. While the Council was responsible for overall administration, the day-to-day work of the Association was increasingly undertaken by a blend of staff members and volunteers. One repercussion of all this activity was that everyone was squeezed into the small Tasma Terrace office that was

rented from the National Trust. Throughout the decade, VNPA sought to expand within Tasma Terrace or to find an alternative home, but to no avail.

Leadership and staff

During the 1990s, VNPA was extremely fortunate in the leadership given by its Directors. Doug Humann, the Director from 1989–97, was an outstanding leader through most of the difficult 1990s. He stimulated the professionalisation of VNPA while engaging with skill in the large and difficult range of challenges he faced and earning the respect of those around him. He was notably a good media performer. He left in August 1997 to be Executive Director of the Australian Bush Heritage Fund in Hobart.

An extensive search resulted in the September 1997 appointment of Amanda Martin, from Environment Victoria, who had a B.Sc. majoring in zoology and immunology. It was a brave move on her part to take on this demanding position at a time when VNPA and its causes were so fiercely under attack, but she proved fully capable.⁶⁹

The Office Manager for much of the 1990s was Teresa Sfara. Other staff members included:

- Barbara Vaughan, Publications Manager and editor of *Park Watch*.
- Tim Allen, National Marine and Coastal Community Network (Southern Region/Victoria).
- Jenny Barnett, Research Officer, especially for Alps issues.
- Felicity Faris, National Threatened Species Network (Victoria).
- James Ross, Grasslands campaigner.
- Charlie Sherwin, Rural Projects Officer and Box-Ironbark campaigner.
- Rodney Waterman, Alpine Projects Officer and Central Highlands Project Officer.
- Nicci Tsernjavski, Marine and Coastal Parks.
- Leslie Sorenson, National Parks Campaign Officer.

Someone who deserves special recognition, and illustrates the complexity of the workings of the Association, is Jenny Barnett. She was a Councillor from 1985 to 1996, and served as Vice President 1989–91. Concurrently, she worked part-time for VNPA from 1987, as well as participating in many activities as a volunteer. In a sense, she was VNPA intelligence officer. At first, her work involved reviewing the science of cattle grazing in the Alps and then, in her long-term position as Research Officer until 2009, dealing with such issues as

cattle grazing, fire management, and nature conservation.

She was the only non-administrative staff member for a brief period until VNPA began to employ specialist campaigners in the 1990s.⁷⁰ Jenny and her husband John tragically perished in the fires that engulfed their Steels Creek property on Black Saturday in 2009.

Lobbying and campaigning

As the Council became more of an administrative body, and Councillors were largely preoccupied with such matters, the number of campaigning staff grew, although such roles were generally part-time and financially dependent on spasmodic project funding. Indeed many staff worked far longer hours than they were paid for and personally covered expenses such as using their own cars and petrol. Also a reflection of the changing times was that a higher proportion of staff, including campaigners, were women.

The lobbying and campaigning methodology of VNPA was evolving and took a slightly different direction as the organisation's campaigning work grew in maturity and professionalism. In previous decades, much VNPA work was focused on acquiring scientific knowledge and using it to assist the work of bodies such as the LCC as well as to persuade politicians and public servants. Providing such information to members through publications was also vital.

In the 1990s, VNPA was successful in winning government and private grants that enabled the employment of a number of young campaigners such as Charlie Sherwin, James Ensor, Tim Allen and Karen Alexander who took campaigning in a slightly different direction and focused much more on community engagement and public awareness and involvement. This entailed considerable involvement with the media, meeting with and talking to opponents of VNPA (such as mountain cattlemen and people involved in the timber, mining, agricultural, grazing and fishing industries), and working with members of the communities in which these industries operated. Publicity, negotiation, education and gentle persuasion to win over people in regional, seaside and other specific communities was often successful in changing attitudes and votes. Taking urban volunteers to work with rural landholders on such projects as tree planting, fencing and habitat corridor establishment built positive relationships and broadened the supporter base of people who would do such things as attend meetings and make submissions. As Charlie Sherwin noted, environmental problems



Charlie Sherwin, Rural Projects and Box-Ironbark Campaigner

Jenny Barnett, Vice President (1989-91), Councillor (1985-96), part-time employee, volunteer and photographer



“

The conference and the Vision Statement were a rallying call to VNPA members and supporters, and to the Victorian community, at a difficult time. It was carefully crafted not to be too overtly critical of contemporary politicians while setting out a desired future path.

are not caused by the environment but by people, and an environmental sociology approach was required to build collegial landcare.⁷¹

Connecting with communities

Complementing the staff, much of the work of VNPA was undertaken by an impressive range of volunteer committees who were deeply involved in the main focus campaigns as well as a range of general functions and activities. They provided support and guidance to staff and Council, and services to members and the public. For example, in 1999, there were 20 Committees: Aboriginal Liaison, Alpine, Box-Ironbark, Excursions, Finance, Grasslands, Membership, Newsletter, Park Watch, Marine and Fisheries, Parks Monitoring, Publications, Walk Talk and Gawk, Bushwalking, Legislation, Education, Prom, Fundraising and Staff. A noticeable development reflecting changing times was that, in mid-1996, an Indigenous Peoples and Protected Areas Committee was established.

VNPA was not alone in the conservation world. As a leading environmental and conservation body with considerable scientific expertise, it had nominees on many external committees and government organisations, including several EES Consultative Committees, the Alpine

Advisory Committee, Environment Victoria and the National Parks Advisory Council. As one of the significant environmental organisations in the state, VNPA also had cooperative relationships with many parallel bodies including the Australian Conservation Foundation, the National Trust, Indigenous Flora and Fauna Association, the Wilderness Society, Greening Australia, Municipal Association of Victoria, Municipal Conservation Association of Victoria, and Federation of Victorian Walking Clubs.

During the decade, the number of financial members hovered above and below 3500, with a moderate rise in the second half of the decade. To serve their interests, and to provide them with relevant activities, was a major VNPA function. The Association organised a myriad of events and activities that were fully, or largely, run by volunteers. In 1994, for example, there were 80 volunteer leaders who conducted 250 walking and associated activities for 3,200 attendees, plus excursions, lectures, picnics and protests.⁷² Walk Talk and Gawk events remained very popular and VNPA continued to assist in the coordination of the many Friends groups that existed for most of the national parks. As well as financial members, VNPA had supporters who donated to its causes and sometimes left legacies. Without them, the Association's functions and effectiveness would have been curtailed.

Publications

One of the main ways of connecting with members, spreading its word and sometimes even making a little money, was by maintaining an output of publications, thanks largely to Barbara Vaughan, Publications Manager, and an active Publications Committee. The monthly *Newsletter* was the principal communicator of news, activities and current campaigns, while the quarterly *Park Watch* magazine contained more detailed articles on the range of issues with which VNPA was dealing.

In most years, there were also at least a couple of books or booklets published. These included:

- *Life on the rocky shores of south-eastern Australia*, by C M Porter, G C Westcott and G P Quinn, 1992.
 - *The coast and hinterland in flower*, 1992.
 - *The Alps in flower*, reprinted third edition, 1993.
 - *Standing up for your local environment*, revised, 1993
 - *The Grampians in flower*, by Ian McCann, 1994.
 - *The forgotten forests: a field guide to the Box-Ironbark country of Victoria*, by Malcolm Calder, Jane Calder and Ian McCann, 1994.
 - *Plains wandering: exploring the Grassy Plains of south-eastern Australia* by Ian Lunt, Tim Barlow and James Ross, 1998.
 - *Looking after native grasslands and grassy woodlands: a guide for landowners, government agencies, extension staff, conservation groups, teachers, students*, 1998.
 - *Discovering the Prom*, revised by Phil Ingamells, 1999.
- The Environment Papers was announced as a forthcoming series in 1994 and four titles were released, but the series was then abandoned for financial reasons:
- *Woodchips or wildlife: the case against logging our native forests*, by Barry Traill, 1995.
 - *The vision splendid: the fight for the Alpine National Park*, by Dick Johnson, 1996.
 - *Out of sight, out of mind: safeguarding our marine environment*, by Tim O'Hara, 1996.
 - *The hand of man: people and fire*, by Malcolm Calder, 1997.

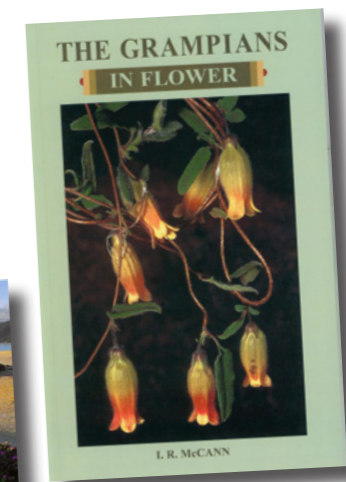
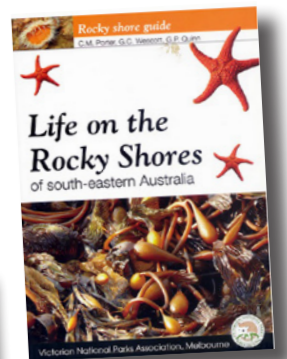


Walk Talk and Gawk in Kooyoora State Park
Bernie Fox

Farewelling pioneers

It is somewhat fitting to end the history of these sad years by noting that they also saw the passing of a number of pioneer members of VNPA, notably J. Ros Garnet (7 Feb 1998), and also Budge Bleakley in 1994, Jim Willis in 1995, Janet Coveney in 1996, Eric Quinlan in 1997 and Gwynneth Taylor in 1998. 🌿

Connie Hart with her woven Poong'ort eel trap at Mt Richmond National Park, 2002
Phil Ingamells



Victoria's National Parks 1999



Big River Arm, Lake Eildon National Park, 1993 Dr Len Smith



Myrtle in Yarra Ranges National Park
Jordan Crook



Heathland, French Island National Park
Geoff L



Elephant Rock, Mornington Peninsula National Park
Stevage/Wikimedia

6. A new century and changing climate: 1999–2010

Slow and steady progress



Park Watch, issue #200, March 2000

With hindsight, it seems unsurprising that the increasingly unpopular Kennett government was defeated at the 1999 election, and that the Labor Party under the popular leadership of Steve Bracks should take government, albeit in minority in the Legislative Assembly (the lower house), with the support of three independents. The upper house, the Legislative Council was another matter, since the Opposition retained control and could and did use that advantage to frustrate the government in many areas, including environmental reforms.

Nevertheless, Bracks and Labor largely proved to be successful and were re-elected in 2002 and 2006. When Bracks suddenly resigned in July 2007, he was replaced as Premier by John Brumby. The sense of progress around protection of the environment faded in the next three years as the Brumby government proved to be less supportive, and the Coalition continued to show a mixture of indifference and hostility. When the Liberals led by Ted Baillieu won the election of December 2010, VNPA expectations were not high.

VNPA had approached the 1999 election with some optimism, as Labor had developed a comprehensive environmental policy that largely followed what VNPA had been advocating. The policy outlined 19 planks whose intention was to reverse many of the changes made by the Kennett government, and to promote its own 'vision for the natural environment'. These included decisions to:

- Establish an Environmental Assessment Council to replace the Environment Conservation Council (ECC).
- Stop the commercialisation of national parks.
- Properly resource and expand the role of park rangers.
- Establish a National Parks and Wildlife Service.
- Save Wilsons Promontory National Park from private development.

- Establish a Port Phillip Marine National Park.¹

In the next decade, the Labor government fulfilled many of VNPA's aspirations. Some of the gains/advances were rapid, but others were slow in coming, largely because of the hostile Legislative Council and interest group resistance. At times, success seemed close, only to be snatched away. It was like a game of snakes and ladders.

That this became one of the more productive periods for the environment in Victoria can be attributed in part to two consultative and determined Ministers for the environment, conservation and related matters in the Bracks government: Sherryl Garbutt to 2006, and then John Thwaites to 2007. Gavin Jennings was the Minister in the Brumby government 2007–10. The

Bracks/Brumby period added a further 364,473 ha to Victoria's suite of parks, fulfilling many of VNPA's long-fought ambitions and campaigns.

This was only part of the story of conservation and VNPA in the decade. As gaps in the parks system were filled, there were external factors and changes in the priorities of the environmental movement that substantially transformed the preoccupations and operation of the Association.

Three main themes mark the history of VNPA during this period. The first was the continuation and eventual substantial success of the ongoing campaigns for Marine and Coastal parks, for Box-Ironbark parks, for the removal of cattle grazing from the Alpine National Park and for the establishment of River Red Gum parks along the Murray River and some of its tributaries.

The second, as these major campaigns were completed, was a further broadening and refocusing of VNPA interest, activity and public engagement well beyond the ecosystems that were held in Victoria's protected areas.

The third, and underlying all of the above, were the extremes of weather linked to climate change that prevailed in the decade resulting in ongoing drought and a series of tragic bushfires.

In the years between 1997 and 2009, much of eastern Australia was in sustained and profound drought. In Melbourne, not a single year reached the long-term rainfall average.² In every year from 1999 to 2010, the annual mean temperature was above the long-term recorded average, and except for 2004, the mean annual temperature was in the hottest 10 per cent of years since records began.³

Low rain and rising temperatures desiccated Victoria and caused a range of social, as well as natural, challenges and disasters. Most notably these included three of the worst periods of bushfires since colonisation: in January–March 2003 (when there were also disastrous fires in and around Canberra), December 2006–February 2007 and February–March 2009.

Despite the mounting scientific evidence and lived experiences, there were still influential climate change deniers in politics, the media, fossil fuel industries and online. It was proving extraordinarily hard to convince everyone in the community that climate change was threatening life as it had been – for all life forms. 🌿



James Ensor, VNPA President, 1998–2001 Ponch Hawkes

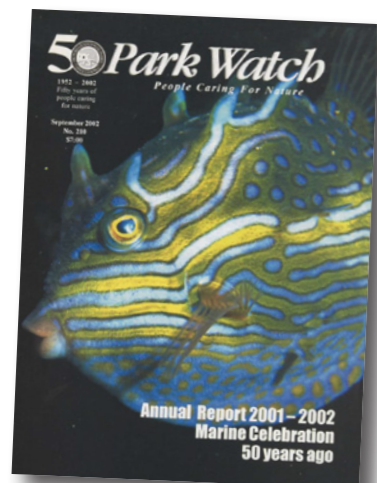
'A sea of Members', VNPA 50th Anniversary portrait, 2002



Steve Bracks, Victorian Labor Premier, 1999–2007
Jenny Mitchell



Three frustrating but successful years: 1999–2002



Park Watch, issue #210, September 2002

The three years from November 1999 to the election of November 2002 saw the Bracks government push ahead with some of its promised environmental reforms, achieving four of the high-level priorities for which VNPA had been campaigning. This was not done easily, as the Liberal and National parties increasingly resisted or modified legislation in the Legislative Council, by representing interest groups in the community who either disliked national parks or saw their extension as infringing on freedoms and/or economic activities. This was exemplified by the fate of the marine parks campaign when, although coming within weeks of the new Victorian government being sworn in, the ECC announced its interim marine recommendations. There would be another two and a half frustrating years before the parks were established.

The new government's first achievement was a National Parks Amendment Bill introduced in May 2000 to return the 285 ha that had been excised at Mt Mackay back into the Alpine National Park. The Act also added 13,000 ha in the Wongungarra Valley to the Alpine National Park and made some other minor changes. The Bill was subjected to considerable debate, but the Legislative Council passed it on 2 June.⁴

After that, the Opposition became more trenchant, using the Legislative Council to delay and amend legislation, notably when the government sought to replace the ECC with the Victorian Environment Assessment Council (VEAC). Legislation was introduced in the Spring Session in

2000 but not debated until the following Autumn. VEAC was to have five members with a mix of skills, and was obliged to undertake a higher level of public consultation than the ECC. There were to be fewer opportunities for political interference and there were obligations on the government to respond quickly to its reports. Most significantly, it was to be able to consider private as well as public land in its deliberations. That last matter was the main sticking point as both the Liberal and National parties were vehemently opposed to any consideration of private land and made several amendments in the Legislative Council to water down the legislation. There it became stuck, while there was concurrently, a standoff over a Marine Parks Bill. Negotiations resolved most issues fairly easily, but the Opposition parties refused to compromise on the matter of private land and the government was eventually forced to concede that VEAC would be limited to considering Crown land. The legislation was finally passed in December 2001 and the VEAC Council was appointed in July 2002.⁵

In the meantime, the Marine and Box-Ironbark issues had been coming to a head, but legislation to establish new protected areas had also become bogged down in the Legislative Council. The timing of events around this time was critical. The next election was due at the end of 2002 and neither side of politics wanted these thorny environmental issues to be left unresolved.

Marine parks

VNPA had been campaigning for protection of coastlines and adjacent seas since the 1970s. In 1986, Joan Kirner had established five marine reserves, though these were largely multi-use 'paper parks' with limited impact on extractive activities like fishing. In 1993, the LCC commenced working through the assessment process for a new marine study, and this was continued by the ECC from 1997. No recommendations had been released before the 1999 election, partly because of government reluctance, partly because of delays caused by the transition from the LCC to the ECC and partly because of mounting opposition from sections of the community.

When the ECC announced its interim recommendations in early 2000, VNPA was reasonably satisfied. It was proposed that along the Victorian coast there would be 12 marine national parks occupying about six per cent of the coast, and 11 smaller but well-protected marine sanctuaries where both angling and commercial fishing would be banned. Fish farming would be allowed on 15 sites.⁶

There was no guarantee that, following public submissions, the Final Recommendations would be as good. There was particular danger from a mounting outcry by various opponents, notably professional fishers, anglers and other recreational water users, and some residents of small coastal communities who had benefited from a range of activities that would be restricted. VNPA knew well that in the face of such opposition, the government might not accept the recommendations, or might not be able to legislate for the parks. VNPA campaigning was renewed, led effectively by Chris Smyth (appointed Marine Campaigner in 2000) and Tim Allen, the Coordinator of the Marine and Coastal Community Network, which was hosted by VNPA in Victoria. Submissions to the ECC and the government, and campaigning to engage public support, were continued.

There was relief when the Final Recommendations published in August 2000 changed little. The recommendations were for 13 marine national parks, 13 marine sanctuaries and 18 special management areas. Existing multiple-use marine parks would remain.⁷ This would make Victoria the leading marine protection jurisdiction in Australia, and a pioneer worldwide. However, a public furore broke out among the opponents to protected areas and it was unclear what the Liberal and National parties would do. VNPA urged the government to legislate as soon as possible. Renowned biologist and television personality David Bellamy visited



VNPA Marine Parks campaign postcard

Melbourne in late 2000 and spoke highly of the significance of the proposed protected areas.⁸

The battle over the marine parks heated up during 2001 as the seafood industry sought essentially to destroy the ECC recommendations, recreational anglers argued that they should be allowed to fish in the parks, and others sought concessions for their activities. One of the main issues was financial compensation to businesses that would be disadvantaged by the new parks, and it was clear that the Opposition intended to represent them in parliament. Faced with this, the government compromised on some of the ECC recommendations in the legislation it tabled. Cape Howe Marine National Park and Ricketts Point Marine Sanctuary were axed, professional and recreational fishing and other activities were to be allowed in more areas, and \$39 million was to be offered in a compensation package.⁹

This was insufficient to satisfy the Opposition, who were determined to hold out for high levels of compensation and other changes, so on 13 June the government withdrew the Marine National Parks Bill. VNPA was aghast, describing it as 'a black day in the history of conservation in Victoria'. It was critical of both government and opposition, and of Independents, Susan Davies and Craig Ingram, for their stances. VNPA determined to fight on for the full ECC recommendations to be adopted.¹⁰ At the same time, the VEAC Bill had stalled in the Legislative Council because of the changes being demanded by the Opposition.

The Marine standoff continued through 2001 and into 2002, with VNPA maintaining its pressure, and with former Premiers Rupert Hamer and Joan Kirner as

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The Marine standoff continued through 2001 and into 2002, with VNPA maintaining its pressure, and with former Premiers Rupert Hamer and Joan Kirner as strong allies.

Mt Mackay in 1988. It was excised from the Alpine National Park, and returned by the Bracks government in 2000
Dr Len Smith





Messages in the bottles: Amanda Martin (VNPA Director), Esther Abram (Environment Victoria Director), James Ensor (VNPA President) and Chris Smyth (VNPA Marine Campaigner) present Sherryl Garbutt (Minister for Environment and Conservation) 6,500 messages in support of marine parks on the Parliament House steps, May 2001
Felicity Leahy

strong allies. The Association developed a coherent media strategy with consistent messaging and sought to involve local communities as far as possible. This proved easier in those coastal areas within two hours' drive from Melbourne, where there was a strong influence from Melbourne weekenders and holiday makers. The response from more distant areas was weaker.

In November 2001, two international marine conservation figures, Valerie Taylor and Sylvia Earle, visited Victoria to promote the marine parks, and David Bellamy made a return visit in March 2002.¹¹ There was considerable community pressure on the Opposition, including 5,000 letters to Shadow Minister Victor Perton. About 10,000 postcards to MPs were returned as part of a VNPA mailout that was sent to residents of coastal regions. With the state election due at the end of the year, neither side wanted the issue left unresolved, and negotiations were commenced. In May, bipartisan support for a revived Bill was agreed to, and the Marine National Parks Bill was reintroduced with Cape Howe and Ricketts Point again included, although there was some boundary redrawing, a few smaller areas were excluded and an enhanced compensation scheme was agreed. The Bill was passed on 13 June 2002 and formally gazetted on 16 November 2002,¹² a fortnight before the election.

There was great celebration in VNPA office and among its members, supporters and much of the wider public. The achievement was ground-breaking and made Victoria a world leader in establishing such a network of parks and protected areas. VNPA was rightly proud of the role it had played in this achievement. The marine national parks were Twelve Apostles, Point Addis, Port Phillip Heads, Yaringa, French Island, Churchill Island, Bunurong, Wilsons Promontory and Corner Inlet.¹³ There were also 11 marine sanctuaries. At the same time, there was a sense of disappointment, and a stark recognition of reality, as only five per cent of relevant waters were protected. There was, and still is, a long way to go.

Weedy Seadragon
Jack Breedon



Box-Ironbark parks

In October 2002, some Box-Ironbark parks had also been declared, following events with a somewhat similar trajectory to the marine battle, although with the final result being somewhat less satisfactory. The long-delayed LCC draft recommendations (the study had been on-going since 1996) were released in May 2000, but were deeply disappointing as they provided protection for only six per cent of this greatly reduced and increasingly threatened ecosystem, of which only 17 per cent had survived since colonisation, with most of the scattered remnants being left open to further exploitation by the timber and mining industries.

The proposal was for four national parks, principally in a Chiltern-Mt Pilot National Park and a St Arnaud Range National Park, and five State Parks, as well as a National Heritage Park at Castlemaine Diggings and four regional parks. Bee-keeping, eucalyptus harvesting, prospecting, mining, logging and firewood cutting were to be allowed to continue in most Box-Ironbark areas, including 121,738 ha of state forest.¹⁴

Prior to the declaration in 2002, VNPA had been highly critical of the lack of a scientifically-based strategy underlying these recommendations and ramped up its campaign, led by the highly active and effective Woodlands Project Officer, Jason Doyle.¹⁵ Some 1,500 submissions were made to the ECC, including many from proponents of those industries and activities who saw themselves as disadvantaged by the proposed protections.¹⁶

Coincident with this, VNPA and other groups were working to raise government and public awareness of the problem of firewood cutting in Box-Ironbark and River Red Gum forests across the northern part of the state. This practice was denuding the forest ecosystems at a rapid rate and threatening species extinction, while burning the wood was contributing to greenhouse gases. In June 2000, VNPA held a big firewood conference in Bendigo, at which expert speakers laid out the issues. Pressure by VNPA and others led to the government setting up a Steering Committee, including Jason Doyle, to produce a firewood strategy to make the industry sustainable.¹⁷

Given the conflicted atmosphere, the final ECC recommendations had not been released before mid-2001, at which time the VEAC Bill was struggling in the Legislative Council and the Marine Bill had been abandoned. It was not a happy period, and even less so, when the ECC Box-Ironbark Final Recommendations were

released in August 2001 and even included some stepping back from the very limited earlier proposals. The ECC was seen to have bowed to the extractive industries and recreational users and was offering only a bare minimum of protection. A particular problem was that in many areas, which were theoretically to be protected, there would be a phase-out period that would allow logging, mining and other destructive activities to continue for several years.¹⁸

Despite the limited extent of the Box-Ironbark recommendations, VNPA was concerned that the government might blink in the face of opposition, as it had done with the Marine Bill. The government was conflicted about what to do as it wished to avoid alienating rural communities which relied on access to the forests. So the environmental campaign was intensified, one activity being a Box-Ironbark camp that was held on a wet weekend in October 2001 with about 500 people who gathered at Paddys Ranges SP near Maryborough to show their support. This was a joint initiative of VNPA, Birds Australia, Field Naturalists' Club of Victoria, Federation of Victorian Walking Clubs and the Maryborough Field Naturalists.¹⁹

The dilemma, standoff and VNPA campaigning continued through the first half of 2002. Features included support by AFL football coach Mick Malthouse and a rally of about 6,000 people on 18 May 2002.²⁰

Finally, more than a decade after the campaign began, and about ten weeks before the election, the government introduced legislation on 12 September 2002. It was still unclear what the Liberals would do but they had been subject to an intense letter-writing campaign. It was remarked in *Update* (as the *Newsletter* became in January 2000) that 'There is no doubt whatsoever that this avalanche of mail contributed to the decision by the Liberal Party to support the bill introduced by the Labor government.'²¹

Despite strident opposition from the National Party and many last-minute amendments, the Bill that was passed on 18 October 2002 did not substantially differ from the ECC's recommendations. It provided for 69,000 ha of national parks, including five new or expanded national parks: Chiltern-Mt Pilot; Greater Bendigo; Heathcote-Graytown; St Arnaud Range; and Terrick Terrick. There would also be 27,000 ha of state parks, 7,000 ha of national heritage parks (essentially Castlemaine Diggings National Heritage Park) and 59,000 ha of nature conservation reserves. This was a very large total, but fell short of the ideal level of protection in many areas. The parks were proclaimed on 20 October 2002.²²



Box-Ironbark tree, Wellsford State Forest, 2009
Wendy Radford

VNPA organised a major celebration and paid tribute not only to the government but also to the two shadow environment ministers, Victor Perton and Bill Forwood, who had worked to establish the protection. They had been assisted by Murray Thompson, the chair of the Liberals' environment committee, who was recognised as a genuine supporter on many environmental issues. Independent Susan Davies also supported the Bill despite a great deal of pressure being placed on her, and at the final vote, Independents Craig Ingram and Russell Savage supported it too. Within VNPA, tributes were paid to Jason Doyle and those who had led the early stages of the campaign – Charlie Sherwin, Barry Traill and Susie Duncan.²³

Local activists who worked for the creation of the Greater Bendigo National Park



Transitioning



Park Watch, issue #223, December 2005

Although the Marine and Box-Ironbark parks had been established at the end of 2002, VNPA was not able to rest. There were still major issues to be seen through, notably to end cattle grazing in the Alpine National Park, and the campaign for the River Red Gum parks (especially in the Barmah State Park and nearby Millewa forest). On the positive side, the end of the two major campaigns freed resources and time allowing the Association to refocus more of its attention on the loss of ecosystems outside parks.

In May 2003 the Association set out its key goals for the next three years, the first four of which are a clear indicator of its evolving focus.

- Expanding the park system
- Improving the existing park system
- Enhancing biodiversity outside the park system
- Developing strategic initiatives for nature conservation.²⁴

The first two continued the drive to expand and improve the parks system, and here there were two immediate major objectives – the abolition of cattle grazing in the Alpine National Park and the creation of River Red Gum national parks along the Murray River system.

The third and fourth goals indicated that VNPA horizons were expanding to include wider biodiversity issues, and over the

next few years this happened at a rapid rate as attention was increasingly directed towards the protection and rehabilitation of ecosystems and declining biodiversity across the state.

This widening of VNPA horizons resulted from a number of factors including the impacts of climate change and mounting recognition of the extent of exploitation of, and damage to, the environment since European arrival. Victorian ecosystems were under enormous stress, both within and outside supposedly protected areas. It had long been recognised that the declaration of a park or reserve was not sufficient to ensure their long-term health. Parks had to be managed and cared for to ensure the longevity and sustainability of ecosystems. They needed sufficient rangers, good management plans, and exclusion of commercialisation, weeds, illegal intrusions, among others.

Beyond that, there was increasing recognition of the need for a landscape-scale approach to protecting and repairing what was left of Victorian ecosystems. There had been earlier work to establish habitat corridors between parks and protected areas, but in this decade the impetus was increasingly moving towards a much broader approach – landscape-scale rehabilitation. An increasing proportion of VNPA resources was directed towards this aim as the decade advanced. 🌿

The fiery climate, the Alps and cattle grazing

As early as 1991, VNPA had hosted a conference on climate change under the theme 'Victoria's flora and fauna: can it survive the greenhouse effect?'²⁵ Warnings about climate change and its impact on Victoria's ecosystems continued in the following years, especially once the long drought and high temperatures set in during the latter half of the 1990s.²⁶ In 2007, VNPA was one of a group of organisations that signed up to a warning document about the threat to our parks and natural environment:

Our national parks, on land and sea, are threatened by climate change and other impacts. These parks and other conservation reserves have been proclaimed by us, and by our forebears, to protect our greatest natural areas for all time. For this generation to hand our parks on to future generations with their natural heritage in serious decline would be a failure beyond measure. We must gather all our knowledge, and all available resources, to secure the long-term integrity of these truly remarkable and irreplaceable landscapes.

Throughout the decade, as the drought worsened, there was increased concern about the ongoing impacts on Victoria's natural systems and biodiversity from climate change, including heat stress, reduced rainfall, water shortages and bushfires.²⁷

The threats from climate change were inescapable in Victoria because it was a period of devastating bushfires. Historically, natural fires were part of the Australian environment, and over thousands of years Indigenous people had modified and managed the landscape using periodic fires as a tool. European occupation had destroyed Aboriginal cultural practices such as 'firestick farming' and as country was no longer burned through traditional methods and cycles, or was modified by Europeans, some forests and grasslands were more likely to burn and to burn more fiercely when fires broke out. The first mammoth fire in Victoria occurred as early as 1851 when an estimated five million hectares burned, by far the largest. Other large historical fires occurred in 1898, 1926, 1938–39, 1944 and 1983 and, while inquiries led to some practical measures to limit and control fires, nothing could stop the deadly conflagrations of the first decade of the 21st century (and beyond). There were fires in every year, but the most devastating were in 2003, 2006–07 and 2009. In 2003 1.3 million ha in eastern Victoria went up in flames, including a large

part of Mt Buffalo National Park and in the Alps including the Alpine National Park. From December 2006 to February 2007, the longest-running fire consumed 1.2 million ha. The massive bushfires of January and February 2009 were relatively small in area at 450,000 ha, but culminated in the horrific Black Saturday fires of 7 February when 173 people died. Huge numbers of flora and fauna were killed by the fires, and large areas of mountainous and forested public land, notably in the Alpine National Park and other protected parks, were reduced to blackened landscapes.

One public response, counter-intuitive perhaps, was the emotional reaction of blaming 'greenies' for the extent of the fires, and VNPA received threats and verbal abuse for its association with national parks. The argument was partly the result of ignorance, but was used by people who opposed national parks and wanted them opened up for clearing and exploitation. Such people described parks as dangerous accumulations of weed-infested flammable bush, conflagrations waiting to happen. Their argument concluded that if public and private land and bush were cleared, there would have been less combustible material and less likelihood that fires would spread. Some of the extremists postulating this argument could be easily caricatured as wanting to clear and concrete the whole state.²⁸

More sensibly, to a degree, attention turned to the practice of controlled or cool or prescribed burns that would follow Indigenous practices of managing ecosystems, reducing combustible material and lowering the risk of large and spreading fires. However, here again, there were extremists (including journalists and politicians) with little or no understanding of, or consideration for, what impact ill-considered fires would have on Victorian ecosystems. Cool burns are a delicate scientific tool that require a clear understanding of appropriate periods and place to ensure that they manage, rather than destroy, flora and fauna and are habitat- or vegetation-type specific. In many places, some replication of Indigenous and/or natural fires was required to maintain, rather than destroy, delicate ecosystems. If burned too frequently or in excessively hot fires, they could be irretrievably damaged. Scientific understanding was still developing for over 300 different vegetation types statewide, and it was a difficult process to



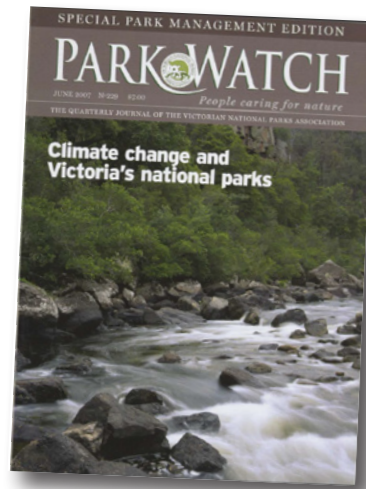
Ian Harris, VNPA President, 2001–04

Yellow Paper Daisies, Wychitella Nature Conservation Reserve
Jenny Barnett



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Throughout the decade, as the drought worsened, there was increased concern about the ongoing impacts on Victoria's natural systems and biodiversity from climate change including heat stress, reduced rainfall, water shortages and bushfires.



Park Watch, issue #229, June 2007

convince the public of such subtleties and complexity; it was far easier to simplistically advocate regular burning as an easy solution to bushfire control. For example, the parliamentary inquiry into the 2006 bushfires recommended that Victoria should triple its fuel reduction target each year, and that if that target was not reached, the remainder should be added to the following year's target.

In response, Jenny Barnett demonstrated that the recommendation was without any scientific foundation. As this suggests, prescribed burning was not always done well, and at times it caused considerable damage, especially when fires escaped—as happened in Wilsons Promontory National Park in April 2005, burning 7,000 ha.²⁹ In January 2006, a 'controlled' burn in the Grampians (Gariwerd) National Park also roared out of control and half of the national park was burned.³⁰ The Royal Commission into the 2009 bushfire recommended a further tripling of prescribed burns to 385,000 ha, even though there was no reliable baseline data to support such extreme action, and there was a shortage of scientists to undertake the necessary research.³¹ This took VNPA some years to untangle, though many still hold concerns about the levels of prescribed burning in Victoria.

Another unfortunate repercussion of the bushfires was that some people took advantage of the situation to fell and/or log as many trees as they could. For example, in February 2003, a massive unauthorised fire break, 50 metres wide and 25 km long, was cleared along Yalmy Road on the boundary of Snowy River National Park. Most of the trees were taken away as logs, leaving the highly combustible residue on the ground. An inquiry was set up, but the issue appears to have petered out.³² Beyond that, after each bushfire, there were efforts to harvest dead and dying trees as 'salvage logging'. However, not all trees that were felled were in that condition and, taking advantage of the situation, great numbers of trees that would have regrown were sent to sawmills.³³

An issue that the fires played into, and ironically, contributed to a positive result, was that of cattle grazing in the Alpine National Park. In 1998, the Kennett government had renewed the grazing licences for a further seven years, so the sights of VNPA were focused on preventing a further extension in 2005. Licences covered 214,000 ha, or about a third of Alpine National Park, but there was nothing to stop the cattle straying beyond those limits. An article titled 'Cow Paddocks or Parks?' in *Park Watch* in December 2001 set the scene and the theme for the renewed campaign. It outlined the history

of grazing in the high country and of the scientific evidence that demonstrated how environmentally damaging it was.³⁴ Bushfires would add another element to the debate.

The long period of drought from the mid-1990s impacted on the high country and made it vulnerable to deterioration. It also left much of Victoria parched, with grass in short supply, and this increased the dependence of mountain cattlemen on high-country grazing over summer. A bushfire in January 1998 had damaged an area in the Alpine National Park and led to lobbying by Jenny Barnett to have cattle excluded from the damaged region. Despite opposition from the Mountain Cattlemen's Association (MCA), the argument was accepted by the new government and cattle were excluded from that zone.³⁵ Nevertheless there was ongoing pressure from licence holders following subsequent fires to be given as much access as possible. Generally the government and Parks Victoria limited this threat.

The 2003 bushfires burned large areas of the Alpine National Park, including significant parts of the Bogong High Plains. Many delicate ecosystems such as sphagnum bogs that had already been damaged by cattle would now struggle even more to recover, and with weed invasion likely to follow. Threatened species such as the Mountain Pygmy Possum were made more vulnerable. VNPA and others were concerned about recovery, recognising the need to employ experts in the management of alpine and sub-alpine ecosystems.³⁶

Despite this, and paradoxically, the bushfires were used as an argument to continue the presence of cattle. There was a simplistic logic in the assertion by the MCA that cattle lessened fire risk by reducing grass and other combustible material. There was no scientific evidence for this, or indeed, what relationship there might be, but it was one of the major challenges faced by Phil Ingamells and VNPA. They and their scientific and environmental allies undertook research and sought evidence, and were essentially able to refute the belief that grazing reduced fires. They also built evidence to reject the false claims that national parks were substantially responsible for fires and that more logging would prevent bushfires. Appropriate prescribed burning should be the way of the future.³⁷

Of course, more than scientific evidence was needed to convince the MCA and their allies of this, so the campaign over cattle grazing heated up during 2003 as renewal time drew closer. Much of VNPA effort was led tirelessly by Phil Ingamells, who moved from the Barmah and Red



Grass tree regenerating after a bushfire

Gum forests campaigns to be the Alpine Grazing Campaigner. He conducted a many-pronged effort that included organising community focus groups, constantly lobbying and meeting allies and opponents, negotiations, and writing numerous articles in *Park Watch*.³⁸ In 2003 VNPA published a brochure, *Alpine National Park... or cow paddock?*, which used graphic images of the grazing damage in the Alps and gave a brief summary of the science showing that grazing spread weeds, did not reduce fire risks and threatened some extinctions. It demonstrated that grazing did more damage than any economic value it provided, and that the claim by the MCA that grazing was part of Australia's cultural heritage was very thin.³⁹

Over the next two years there was scarcely an issue of *Park Watch* and *Update* that did

not contain an article about cattle grazing and the damaged state of the Alpine National Park.

In 2004, Phil Ingamells was able to take Minister Thwaites and others to see the damage done by cattle, and the Minister was sufficiently convinced to appoint an Alpine Grazing Taskforce. Its report in March 2005 concluded that cattle grazing did much damage and did not reduce the impact of fires. It also agreed with the argument 'that the cultural heritage related to the grazing of livestock in the high country does not depend on ongoing grazing in the national park.' Most importantly, it found that cattle grazing in the Alpine National Park was inconsistent with the primary objects of the *National Parks Act* and was 'not compatible with national and international standards'.⁴⁰

This report gave the final motivation for the government to ban grazing in the Alpine National Park. Legislation was introduced and, despite sometimes heated debates from members who supported the MCA, it passed through the Legislative Council on 17 June 2005 – after fifty years of campaigning by VNPA. There was great celebration at VNPA with congratulations to Phil Ingamells, Charlie Sherwin, Tom Guthrie and the Alpine Grazing sub-committee.⁴¹

Sadly, however, this was not the end of the issue. Later in 2005, the MCA requested emergency National Heritage listing of cattle grazing as a threatened cultural heritage activity. The Federal Environment Minister, Ian Campbell, supported the

move but it was rejected by the Australian Heritage Council and the Minister backed off.⁴²

The Victorian Liberals had supported the MCA move and made it clear that they intended to return cattle to the Alpine National Park once they won power. They and the National Party took this position to the November 2006 election, which they lost. When they returned to government in 2010, their Environment Minister adopted the unsuccessful subterfuge of returning cattle to some areas of the National Park as a 'scientific experiment'.⁴³

That is a story for another time, as is the explosion of feral horse and deer numbers in the Alps. 🐾

Red Gum Forests

The success of the cattle grazing campaign enabled more resources to be put into the other main outstanding ecosystem that was in dire danger – the Red Gum forests and wetlands that lined much of the Murray River and its tributaries, and were increasingly stressed by the drought. At first, most of the focus of VNPA was on the Barmah-Millewa forests (especially Barmah State Park) on the Murray upstream from Echuca.

There had long been concern about the degradation of the forests due to logging for firewood and timber and extensive cattle grazing, but the absence of periodic environmental flows/floods due to diversion of water for agricultural and domestic purposes, became critical during the drought. Late in the previous century, VNPA had begun discussions with the Traditional Owners, the Yorta Yorta, acknowledging their connection to the land and working with them to have the Red Gum forests protected.

As mentioned earlier, in 2000 VNPA ran a major firewood conference led by

Jason Doyle, and was instrumental in the government moving to establish a firewood business plan. To aid understanding and planning, Jenny Barnett undertook research into the environmental management and monitoring of Red Gum forests.⁴⁴

There was some initial progress in 2002 when Minister Garbutt announced that logging in Barmah State Park would end in mid-2003.⁴⁵ In mid-2002, a new Barmah campaigner, Nick Roberts, was appointed, and later in the year, VNPA was at the centre of the establishment of the Dharnya Alliance of environmental groups formed at a Barmah-Millewa summit.⁴⁶ Meanwhile, the forests were deteriorating because of lack of water flows.⁴⁷

By late 2002, VNPA and government ambitions were spreading beyond Barmah-Millewa towards a linked series of Red Gum parks along the Victorian side of the Murray, that would ideally form part of a cross-border park including the NSW forests. Consequently, there was cautious optimism when, just before the 2002 election, the government announced that VEAC would be asked to conduct a study

Murray Red Gums protest outside Parliament House, 2008

VNPA flyer for the campaign opposing cattle grazing in the Alpine National Park





Park Watch, issue #231, December 2007

along the Murray River from Yarrawonga to Swan Hill.⁴⁸

There was no immediate move after the election so, to maintain the momentum, in March 2003, VNPA commenced a fresh campaign for a Barmah-Millewa Redgum National Park which was launched by Peter Garrett, the Chair of the Australian Conservation Foundation.⁴⁹ A feature of this campaign was the emphasis on working with local community groups and, most importantly, the Yorta Yorta Traditional Owners. First Nations communities were recognised by VNPA as fundamental, and strong relationships were formed by frequent meetings and consultations.

Part of the evolving proposal was for shared management of the new national parks with the Yorta Yorta. In 2005, VNPA joined the National Parks Association of NSW in an expanded Red Gum Icons Project to establish a network of River Red Gum national parks along both sides of the Murray River and its major tributaries. At VNPA, Nick Roberts was the Campaign Officer and Phil Ingamells became the Campaign Publications Coordinator. A Barmah Committee was convened by Geoff Lacey.⁵⁰

Eventually, in April 2005, Minister Thwaites initiated the promised VEAC investigation into River Red Gum forests. VNPA undertook the usual processes of preparing a submission and calling upon its supporters to do the same, while endeavouring to stimulate public awareness.⁵¹ The drought and concurrent bushfire crisis underlined the need for action, but also acted as a distraction. A VEAC Discussion Paper published in October 2006 essentially described the geographic and scientific criteria.⁵²

Then in July 2007, VEAC published its Draft Proposals which, although they did not contain everything that VNPA wanted, were described as 'outstanding' and 'visionary'. It recommended adding 100,000 ha of protected areas, much in the five new Red Gum national parks – Barmah, Gunbower, Lower Goulburn River, Warby Range-Ovens River and Leaghur-

Koorangie – and an extension to Murray-Sunset National Park. There would be a range of other protected areas and, very significantly, there was to be involvement of Traditional Owners in the management of the parks. The Proposals emphasised the need for environmental flooding to save the ecosystems.⁵³

Predictably, the proposed parks met significant opposition from timber cutters, hunters and others who wished to continue their activities in the forests.⁵⁴ VNPA maintained its pressure and was somewhat relieved when the Final Report was published in July 2008. It included some minor reduction in the size of some of the protected areas, including Barmah, but otherwise it repeated the draft proposals.⁵⁵ The relief did not last long because, in the face of community pressure the Brumby government faltered and procrastinated, and then established a Ministerial Community Engagement Panel to undertake a fresh review.⁵⁶

Fortunately, the Panel delayed rather than significantly altered the recommendations and on 30 December 2008, the government committed to protect 100,000 ha of Red Gum forest in four new national parks and other parks and reserves. The national parks were Barmah, Gunbower, Lower Goulburn River and Warby-Ovens. There was to be some joint management with the Yorta Yorta.⁵⁷

However, the legislation was delayed because of political and community opposition and meanwhile damage from cattle and logging continued. VNPA was horrified that the government continued to use red gum rather than concrete railway sleepers on some of its lines.

Eventually the legislation was passed in November 2009, and the parks declared in June 2010.⁵⁸

Included in the package of legislation was a proposal for a Murray River Park which would consolidate a large number of the reserves and Crown land along the banks of the Murray from Yarrawonga to the South Australian border. Although legislated, the Murray River Park has (in 2023) still not been officially gazetted. 🌿

Other new parks

During this decade, a number of other parks were established, from the large Great Otway National Park to the smaller Point Nepean and Cobboboonee national parks.

Great Otway National Park

Most of the impetus for the creation of the Great Otway National Park came from people who lived in the region, local environment groups (such as the Otway Ranges Environment Network, whose members took direct action against loggers), together with some national groups such as the Wilderness Society. The Otway Ranges on the south-western Victorian coast were a densely forested area, much of which had been heavily logged since colonisation.

In 1981, part of the Otways had been declared a national park, but by the late 20th century there was mounting community pressure to stop all logging and protect what was left, as well as protecting several other ecologically

significant sites along the south-west coast. These included a number of small-to-medium state parks, state forests and other places that were considered to be in need of protection.

Prior to the 2002 election, the government announced that it was instructing VEAC to examine the potential for a large multi-site Angahook-Otway national park between Anglesea and the Otways. It would be based on the existing Otway National Park and potentially bring together many of the smaller sites.⁵⁹ VNPA expressed support.

VEAC moved quickly and released its Angahook-Otways discussion paper in November 2003. This endorsed the concept of an enlarged national park.⁶⁰ The majority of the recommendations in the final report, released in November 2004, were accepted by the government. The Great Otway National Park included an amalgamation of Otway National Park, Melba Gully State Park, most of Angahook-Lorne State Park and Carlisle State Park, plus another 25 reserves and three new reference areas (Porcupine Creek, Aquila



Great Otway National Park at Wye River
Chris Orr

Sherryl Smith and Tigger from the Otway Ranges Environment Network padlocked to logging equipment in the Otways, March 2000
Jenny Mitchell



“

A feature of this campaign was the emphasis on working with local community groups and, most importantly, the Yorta Yorta Traditional Owners. First Nations communities were recognised by VNPA as fundamental, and strong relationships were formed by frequent meetings and consultations.



Point Nepean National Park
Peter McConchie

Creek and Painkalac Creek). The parks were declared by Premier Bracks in December 2005.⁶¹

Point Nepean National Park

In a drawn-out fight to establish Point Nepean National Park, VNPA invested substantially more energy than it had in other activities. It was a relatively small site and parts had been damaged by 150 years of diverse human activities. It was also valued by many people for its historic or built heritage rather than its ecological value.

Point Nepean, on the eastern side of the entrance to Port Phillip, had been chosen in the 1850s as the site for Melbourne's quarantine station and as a defence fortification. Following federation in 1901 the peninsula became Commonwealth property, and the forts were further developed in both WWI and WWII. As military technology changed after WWII, land-based forts were no longer so relevant, so the army wound the fortification down and used the site for other purposes. Similarly, as aircraft replaced passenger shipping from the 1960s, the quarantine station was superseded and closed in 1980, although

it was used by the army and for Kosovar refugees during the 1990s.

As a narrow peninsula of coastal woodland and other coastal vegetation, with Port Phillip on one side and Bass Strait on the other, Point Nepean had marine and coastal ecological significance for VNPA.

In 1988, 265 ha of the site was transferred back to Victoria and declared part of the existing Point Nepean National Park, which was extended and renamed Mornington Peninsula National Park in 1995. The Commonwealth retained the rest, which the Howard government proposed to sell or lease to private enterprise. However, a strong local community reaction was supported by the National Trust, and VNPA was encouraged to become involved.

President Ian Harris and coastal campaigner Chris Smyth took the lead within VNPA, and worked to stop the sale and return all the land to the state to be incorporated into the national park. This, in itself, was problematic for some in VNPA, as such a large collection of heritage buildings within a Victorian national park was not seen by everyone as core business.

The issue dragged on for years with VNPA working with the passionate local community in their battle to save the site from commercial development. The Howard and Bracks governments were at loggerheads until eventually, in 2005, the Commonwealth agreed to give a further 205 ha to Victoria to be included in the renamed Point Nepean National Park. The Commonwealth retained the remaining 90 ha, which included the heritage buildings of the quarantine station, with plans to sell to a developer. There was further resistance to this in Victoria and the impasse continued until finally, in 2009, the federal Rudd Labor government (with Peter Garrett as Environment Minister) handed over the remaining land and quarantine station to be included in the Point Nepean National Park.⁶²

Cobboboonee National Park

This park, north-west of Portland and adjacent to the Lower Glenelg National Park, was born largely out of a campaign by locals with the support of the Wilderness Society and VNPA.

Its 18,510 ha were declared a park in 2008 to protect significant areas of lowland forest, wetlands and a range of endangered and vulnerable vegetation types, as well as threatened species including forest owls, small marsupials and a species of skink.⁶³

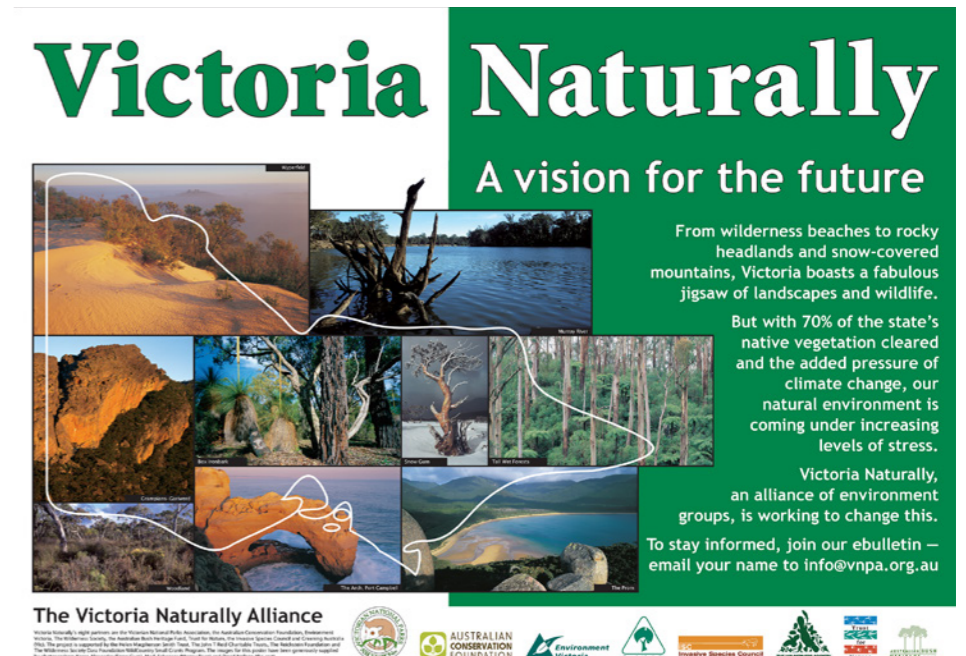
Remnants Project

While VNPA never weakened in its desire to create protected areas, or to care for existing ones through monitoring of management structures, assessing management plans or pushing for their development where they did not exist, a noticeable change came over VNPA operations during the first decade of the new century. As a result, there was a significant broadening of the environmental issues in which it was involved and some changes in how it worked.

As VNPA gradually ticked off its main park ambitions, the Association had more opportunity to involve itself in broader environmental issues, especially as relentless development and the impacts of climate change were placing Victorian ecosystems under intense pressure. Private land was central to much of this as there was mounting awareness that so much of the state had been degraded that the losses of biodiversity were on a landscape scale. Consequently, VNPA increasingly became involved in fighting such issues as natural values management, strengthening biodiversity, the decline of Victorian ecosystems and increasing threats to species, both within, and outside, protected areas. Much of this was focused on the protection or rehabilitation of 'remnants' – small areas of valuable ecosystems, often isolated and vulnerable, on both government and private land. Karen Alexander returned to VNPA and for a number of years ran the Remnants Project which sought to address these issues across the state, and its allied activities.⁶⁴

Three complementary ways of working evolved. First, much of this activity was done in cooperation with other network organisations; second, there was recruitment of large numbers of volunteers through focus groups and work with communities; and third, volunteers and supporters were brought together for working bees to plant, weed and rehabilitate.

In the early part of the decade VNPA co-hosted five networks: the Grassy Ecosystems Reference Group, the Threatened Species Network, Reef Watch, Marine and Coastal Community Network and the Environment Liaison Office (ELO). VNPA was a foundation member of the ELO in 2002 when, to aid communication with the government, several peak Victorian environmental groups entered into an



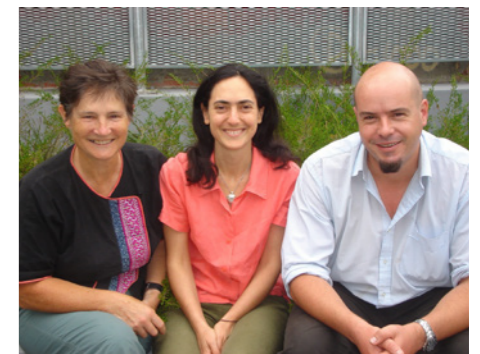
agreement to fund a Parliamentary ELO. The ELO attended parliamentary sessions and facilitated information flow between the groups and Ministers and members of parliament, particularly in the development of legislation.⁶⁵

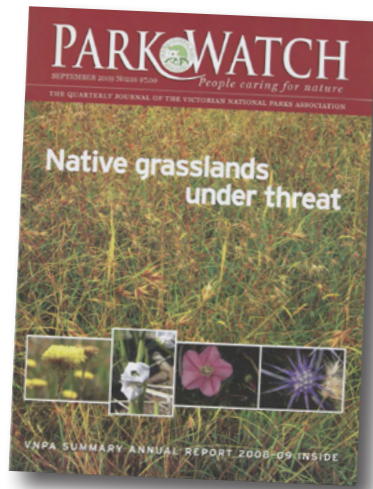
Another network housed with VNPA was Victoria Naturally, an alliance of eight peak environmental groups which came together in 2004, its purpose being to take concerted action to turn around the dire state of Victoria's natural environment. It was able to win funding and did excellent work for a few years, bringing together scientists and developing a knowledge-base of Victorian biodiversity. Those who managed Victoria Naturally included John Sampson, Karen Alexander and Carrie Deutsch. Changes in government and the failure of the White Paper to gain traction contributed to Victoria Naturally fading away.⁶⁶

An impressive volunteer activity was Project Hindmarsh, which had begun quietly in 1997, and ran through the next decade and beyond. It was a Biolink project run in conjunction with Landcare and the Hindmarsh Shire Council. The initial concept was to create a link between the Big Desert and Little Desert by planting native vegetation on roadside stock routes. After four years this was completed and the project morphed into helping farmers to restore vegetation on their land, using seeds collected and grown by Greening Australia. About 100 VNPA volunteers

Victoria Naturally poster, 2007

Victoria Naturally crew: Karen Alexander, Carrie Deutsch and John Sampson





Park Watch, issue #238, September 2009

attended each of the annual planting weekends, and by 2007, some 2000 km of native bushland had been planted with 1.5 million trees and shrubs.⁶⁷

A similar volunteer scheme was Grow West, which operated in the Bacchus Marsh-Werribee region to grow and plant indigenous species. For example, on a community planting day in July 2009, 150 volunteers (including VNPA members) planted 6300 indigenous seedlings on a bare hillside near Myrning.⁶⁸

An early cooperative innovation was the establishment in 2002, of the Reef Watch program, which encouraged volunteer divers to observe and monitor reefs for changes and developments affecting marine plants and animals.⁶⁹

This was followed a few months later with a similar project for terrestrial protected areas, initially named Park Guardians. It organised members to evaluate the condition of parks on a score card. Groups were organised to visit a park where they would undertake surveys and monitoring. In 2003, the name was changed to ParkMates and again, in 2007, to NatureWatch which was involved in a wider range of ecological monitoring activities, including volunteer restoration working bees.⁷⁰

As well as these, there was a bewildering variety of volunteer working parties and task forces on a range of environmental matters such as Boneseed and Orange Hawkweed weeding (the latter in the

alpine high country after the bushfires).⁷¹ All these serve to demonstrate VNPA's increasing commitment to working with community groups and volunteers, by giving them support, training, capacity, guidance and tools that enabled them to mount campaigns and help to protect and rehabilitate Victorian ecosystems.

More broadly, VNPA was also asserting itself on the national and international environmental stage, addressing the federal government on issues that came under the EPBC Act. In early 2010, it was one of forty environmental groups from across Australia that called upon the Commonwealth to protect biodiversity, via the 'Boobook Declaration' which called on the federal government to triple biodiversity investment.⁷²

Through all this work VNPA earned respect, status and public regard in the 1990s and 2000s.

Grasslands (still)

Remnant grasslands across Victoria remained one of the most endangered and shrinking ecosystems, with less than five per cent of this once extensive ecosystem left by the 21st century. Especially under threat were the grasslands on the volcanic plains to Melbourne's west and north, which were disappearing under spreading suburbia.

The only grasslands in the state that had been given national park status were



Grassland community day, 2008

Project Hindmarsh in full swing



the small area at Terrick Terrick, declared in 1999.⁷³ Throughout the new decade VNPA campaigned for the protection of numerous sites including the Hume Freeway Craigieburn bypass, Merri Creek, and the former RAAF base at Laverton. The airbase supported one of the best remnants of native grassland in the region, including important populations of endangered and vulnerable species such as Plains Rice-flower, Large-fruit Groundsel and very rare orchids.⁷⁴

James Ross led VNPA campaign early in the decade, along with the Grassy Ecosystems Network, a cooperative across the four south-eastern states that was accommodated with the VNPA office. Also significantly involved were John Sampson and Victoria Naturally. Both of these groups worked largely with volunteers to protect and conserve remnant grasslands.

The remnant grasslands issue gained momentum in the late years of the decade, although it was never able to grab public sympathy in the way that something like the Prom, or even Point Nepean, did. In 2008 Victoria's volcanic plains native grasslands were listed as critically endangered under the Commonwealth's *Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999* (EPBC Act), and it

was announced that a joint federal-state process called the Melbourne Strategic Assessment was to investigate remnant vegetation around new growth areas.

Its recommendations, in 2009, were in some respects positive, proposing 15,000 ha be declared in reserves, but otherwise setting a new growth boundary for the city that would swallow extensive areas of grasslands, including some of the most highly endangered ecosystems. This latter aspect caused VNPA grave concern and in the next two years, it maintained its agitation for more land to be protected, and for appropriate private land to be purchased up front, instead of with a developer levy payable only as development happened.

In late 2009, the Brumby government established the proposed reserves, an action supported by the federal government early in 2010. There was to be a 15,000 ha native grassland reserve, and a smaller area of grassy woodland reserve as an offset for allowing around 6000 ha of grasslands to be cleared for urban development. VNPA welcomed the package but disputed the need to clear further areas and the use of offsets rather than avoidance of clearing.⁷⁵ The ongoing protection of grasslands would be a continuing challenge for VNPA. 🌿

“
The remnant grasslands issue gained momentum in the late years of the decade, although it was never able to grab public sympathy in the way that something like the Prom...”

Putting out spotfires



Bernie Fox, VNPA President, 2004–07
John Sampson

Inevitably, for VNPA, there were frequent spotfires to be put out or small conflagrations to deal with. These included some of the following.

High-speed train

There were periodic proposals to build a high-speed train line from Melbourne to Sydney, generally via the La Trobe Valley and East Gippsland forests.

While VNPA supported rail travel, the proposed lines would have carved wide corridors through hundreds of kilometres of forests, including some old growth forests in national parks. VNPA strongly opposed these routes.

Nowingie/Hattah

From 2004, there was concern with a government proposal to establish a toxic waste facility near Nowingie and Hattah-Kulkyne National Park. This was because of potential threats from the transportation of waste from Melbourne, the destruction process itself and the land clearing it would require.

Following widespread public opposition from VNPA and others, the government established an inquiry which found against the proposal, and early in 2007, it was abandoned.⁷⁶

Wind farms

Wind farms were a tricky issue for VNPA as they are a significant way of providing sustainable electrical energy, but they can also strike birds, and some people see

them as a visual intrusion on landscapes. Whereas the National Trust became deeply divided over the issue and substantially opposed wind farms because of their intrusion on landscapes, VNPA chose to object only when they were too near to protected areas, such as the Bay of Islands Coastal Park.

VNPA therefore limited its role to monitoring windfarm developments adjacent to national parks and other conservation reserves.⁷⁷

Fruit Bats (Flying Foxes)

For a few years early in the century, there was extensive community debate about how to deal with a colony of fruit bats – actually Grey-headed Flying-foxes (*Pteropus poliocephalus*) – that had established itself in Melbourne's Royal Botanic Gardens and was damaging and threatening some of the valuable old trees.

Opinion was divided at the extremes between those who viewed the bats as an indigenous species and therefore more valuable than exotic trees, and those who advocated the culling of the bats to preserve Melbourne's heritage gardens. VNPA was in some conflict on this issue, but was not in favour of culling. After a long standoff, the bats were removed to a new site on the Yarra at Fairfield.⁷⁸

Channel deepening

A drawn-out and worrying issue was the determination of the government to dredge a deep channel across Port Phillip and through the Heads so that larger ships

could use the Port of Melbourne. The project would inevitably do much damage to Bay ecosystems by spreading silt, changing water movements along beaches and causing rockfalls in the Heads.

Debates, studies, reports and inquiries dragged on through the decade but in 2008, dredging by the *Queen of the Netherlands* was commenced. It was completed in late 2009. Debate continued, and continues, as to how much damage was done.⁷⁹

Government White Paper, 2009

As VNPA became increasingly focussed on the challenges of climate change and landscape-scale degradation, it lobbied the government to invest in an understanding of the issue and to plan for the future. Minister Thwaites was won over and in 2007, the Brumby government issued a discussion paper and announced its intention to prepare a White Paper to act as a guide to combatting the big issues facing the Victorian environment, and particularly, to prepare for the ongoing impact of climate change.⁸⁰ Over the next few weeks there were 360 submissions which contributed to the publication of a Green Paper early in 2008, *Land and Biodiversity at a time of climate change*.

VNPA was highly critical of the Green Paper, arguing that it 'reveals an alarming lack of vision and understanding' of the issues. While the Paper identified the challenges, it did not offer solutions. Alarming, it flagged the watering down of

key legislation such as the *Flora and Fauna Guarantee Act* (1988) whose purposes it described as 'probably beyond our management capacity and could be revised to a more realistic objective'. VNPA also argued that the Paper failed to realistically address the challenges of climate change.⁸¹

When the White Paper was published in December 2009, VNPA had a mixed response. On the one hand, the Association saw much that was promising, such as recognising the need for landscape connectivity through biolinks and flagship areas, and a commitment to establish a major grassland reserve in Melbourne's west. On the other, they found much that was disappointing and needed to be stronger, as well as a good deal that was missing. Particularly alarming were the proposal to abolish VEAC, and the absence of clear targets and provision of appropriate funding. In the long run, it was this last point, the failure to fund action to deal with climate change, which saw the purpose of the White Paper fail, and when the Baillieu government was elected in 2010, it showed little interest.⁸²

In some ways, the paucity of the government's plans in the White Paper encapsulated the drift of Labor after 2007, away from the priority that the environment had been given under Steve Bracks and his ministers.

The list of spotfires continued: Regional Forest Agreements, duck shooting, Snowy River flows, willow trees on river banks, woodchipping, metal detectors, Bastion Point, offshore oil drilling, the Small Parks Project, among others. 🌿

Bastion Point campaign

VNPA anti-channel deepening campaign postcards, 2009



A new headquarters



Fred Gerardson, VNPA President, 2007-10

A browse through the VNPA library impresses one with the scale and nature of the scientific knowledge and passion of the organisation. Whereas the public view of VNPA is essentially of an activist organisation devoted to establishing and protecting parks and protected areas, that is only the tip of the iceberg.

Beyond the public view lay decades of scientific research into Victorian ecosystems: research undertaken by both VNPA and the wider scientific community. That is one of the factors that have made it such a significant and successful body since its founding in 1952. Staff and volunteers have mainly been people with a scientific education, supplemented by skills in lobbying and activism. Maintaining skilled, active and knowledgeable staff and volunteers has enabled VNPA to be one of the most credible and successful environmental organisations in Victoria.

The location of the Association's office and library were changed in November 2002, when VNPA moved to the 60L Green Building in Leicester Street, Carlton. The new premises were in an 1876 building that was renovated and retrofitted, the first serious attempt to design a commercial building in Melbourne on green principles. It boasted such features as rainwater collection and use; on-site treatment of waste water and sewage; passive and mechanical ventilation, heating

The 60L Green Building, Carlton
Australian Conservation Foundation



and cooling; and efficient energy derived from non-fossil fuel sources.

Negotiations for the tenancy became serious in 2000, but building delays lengthened the process. The new VNPA office was officially opened on 27 February 2003 by Minister John Thwaites.⁸³ VNPA shared the building with a number of other environmental groups including the Australian Conservation Foundation and Environment Victoria,⁸⁴ and some green commercial enterprises. One minor disadvantage was that it was no longer possible to cross the road to see people in Parliament House, as had been the case in Tasma Terrace.⁸⁵

Occupancy of the 60L Building was a reflection of what a significant and successful organisation VNPA had become through its expertise and range of activities. At the same time, Charlie Sherwin has described it as an 'unruly organisation' but also a 'community of heart' because it combined so many elements, activities and commitments. It brought together a rich blend of volunteers and staff who had huge passion, endeavour and commitment for the Association and for the environment. On the most basic level, running the traditional activities such as bushwalking, excursions and support of the Friends Network involved a very substantial effort, mainly volunteer, but also with much input and support from the office managers. Trying to corral all that human enthusiasm into an organisation with a coherent plan, and compliant with legal requirements, was a major achievement. Adherence to the Mission Statement and revision of the annual Strategic Plan required considerable input, but guided the organisation and helped it to remain on track.⁸⁶

Despite the great support from volunteers and members, as a community membership organisation, VNPA also needed significantly wider financial support from donor philanthropists, bequests, and grants from foundations. Fortunately, concern about the environment, together with the skills of VNPA's executive directors and fundraising officers, stimulated the generosity of supporters and donors. Consequently, the Association was able to increase staff numbers and to involve itself in a broad range of activities as well as main campaigns.

VNPA Council continued to evolve, increasingly focused on governance and administration matters, while mainstream activities were devolved to the executive

director, staff and committees. The Presidents during the decade were James Ensor to 2001, Ian Harris 2001-04, Bernie Fox 2004-07 and Fred Gerardson 2007-10.

In 2003, there were 24 committees, a list that gives an excellent glimpse of the range of VNPA functions: Aboriginal Liaison, Advertising and Promotion, Alpine, Annual Picnic, Barmah, Box Ironbark, Bushwalking, Education and Interpretation, Excursions, Executive, Finance, Friends, Fundraising and Development, Grasslands, Legislative, Marine, Parks Monitoring, Park Watch, Publications, South West, Update, Walk Talk and Gawk, and 50th Anniversary.⁸⁷ A new Strategic Plan in 2008 reduced the frequency of Council meetings to quarterly ones plus special purpose meetings, and placed more responsibility in the hands of the Executive Committee. The number of committees was reduced to seven, and the decision was made to move to greater reliance on staff rather than on volunteers.⁸⁸

There were four executive directors during the decade. Amanda Martin resigned to go to Parks Victoria in 2001 (Jason Doyle became Acting Director) and was replaced by Michael Fendley from Birds Australia. He left in November 2003 (Nick Roberts became Acting Director) and Charlie Sherwin returned as Director in early 2004. After he left in 2007, he was replaced in July as Executive Director by Matt Ruchel from ACF, where he had been Manager Land and Water and Acting Campaigns/Strategies Manager, and previously a long-term campaigner and team leader at Greenpeace Australia Pacific and Greenpeace International during the 1990s.⁸⁹

In 2003, as an example, VNPA had the following staff: Jenny Barnett (Research Officer), Robin Crocker (National Parks Planning and Management Officer), Jason Doyle (Woodlands Campaign Officer), Bill Fenton (Fundraising and Membership Officer), Phil Ingamells (Alpine Grazing and Barmah Publications Officer), Effie Kene (Officer Manager), Anna Mandoki (Accounts Manager), Juliana Ryan (Publications and Communications Officer), Nick Roberts (Barmah-Millewa Project Coordinator), Wendy Roberts (Reef Watch Coordinator), Kym Saunders (Park Guardians Project Officer) and Chris Smyth (Coasts and Marine Campaign Officer).

Also working from the office at that time were network staff Julie Kirkwood (Threatened Species Network), Tim Allen (Marine and Coastal Community Network) and Suzie Brown (Environment Liaison Officer).⁹⁰

Other staff deserving mention were two long-term employees who departed in 2000. Barbara Vaughan retired as Publications Officer, a role she held since 1989, although she continued to do some contract work.⁹¹ Teresa White, née Sfara, resigned after 15 years to look after a new baby.⁹² Two others who made a significant contribution were campaigner Karen Alexander and Publications Manager and *Park Watch* Editor, Michael Howes.

Hard copy publications were no longer as central to VNPA during the decade, at least partly because of growing use of the internet and the development of a VNPA website. However, several important publications were produced. Of primary significance, was the third *Nature Conservation Review* that was undertaken by Barry Traill and Christine Porter and launched early in 2001 by the Governor, John Landy. It was financed by the Jean Blackburn Fund. The study was divided into two sections, the first on the marine environment and the second on the terrestrial environment (land, rivers and wetlands). It painted a challenging picture of the threats to Victoria's biodiversity, and the gaps in the conservation reserve system, while providing a sound scientific basis for the current range of campaigns.⁹³ In 2008 work began on the fourth review, by Carol Booth and Andrew Cox, whose purpose was to concentrate essentially on impacts of and adaptations to climate change. It was not published until 2014 and there was substantial input from a number of people within VNP. It was the most comprehensive of the reviews and contained a range of contextual material as well as assessments of a wide range of environments.⁹⁴

Other publications included:

- *Discovering The Prom*, revised by Phil Ingamells, VNPA 1999.
- *Discovering Mount Buffalo*, by Phil Ingamells, VNPA 2001.
- *Discovering Grampians-Gariwerd; a visitor's guide to Grampians National Park*, by Alistair Paton and Bruce Paton, VNPA 2004.

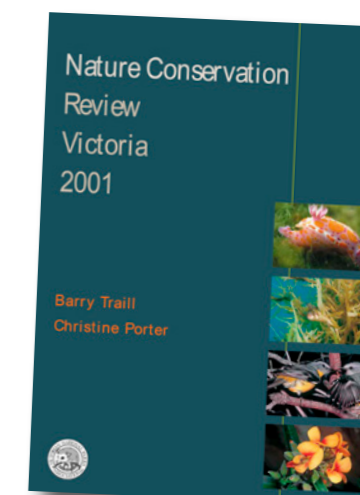
Park Watch was published quarterly throughout the decade, becoming increasingly colourful. Impressively, for many years, there was scarcely an issue without an article by Geoff Durham containing a word portrait of a national park or other protected area.

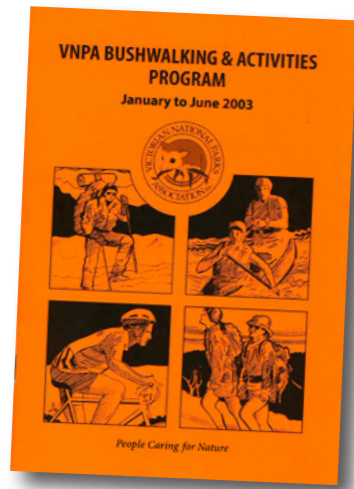
The newsletter changed title and frequency. It was known as the *Newsletter*, with 11 issues per annum, until the end of 1999, then as *Update* with seven issues, until it became *Nature's Voice*, numbered sequentially from July-August 2009 and available as an ebulletin.



Amanda Martin, VNPA Director 1997-2001
Geoff Heard

Nature Conservation Review 2001





VNPA Bushwalking & Activities Guide, January to June 2003

Ending an era

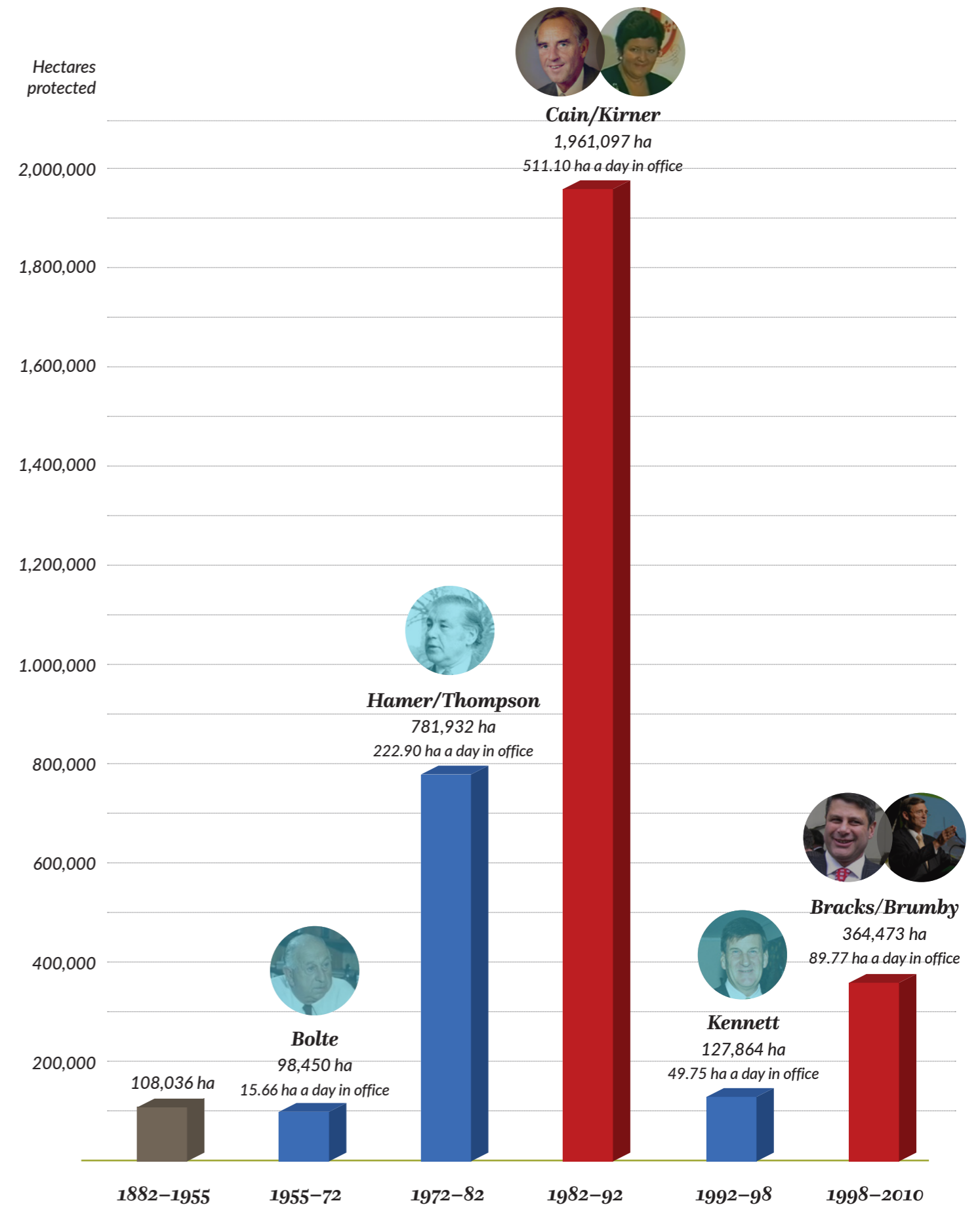
In 2010 Parks Victoria was managing an estate covering more than 4 million ha or about 17 per cent of Victoria. It included 45 national parks, 25 state parks, 13 marine national parks, 11 marine sanctuaries and 3 wilderness parks. A little less central to VNPA, but still of ecological value to the state, there were 90 metropolitan and other parks and 2700 natural features and conservation reserves.⁹⁵ The work of VNPA over the previous decades had played a significant part in achieving many of these reserves.

A tragic event that marked the end of this period brings together some of its themes and strands. Bushfires had burned much

of the state, and one of VNPA people most focused on their impact was Jenny Barnett. She devoted her considerable research skills into the issue of prescribed burning, notably advocating the need for scientific research and data to guide what should be burned, and when and how.

On 7 February 2009, Jenny and her husband, John, were killed in the fire that swept through Steels Creek. The VNPA community was devastated by her death. In the March 2009 issue of *Park Watch*, which was dedicated to them, President Fred Gerardson described her as 'one of the major rocks upon which our reputation for well-researched and scientifically-based representations has been based'.⁹⁶

Creation of Victorian national parks, by government

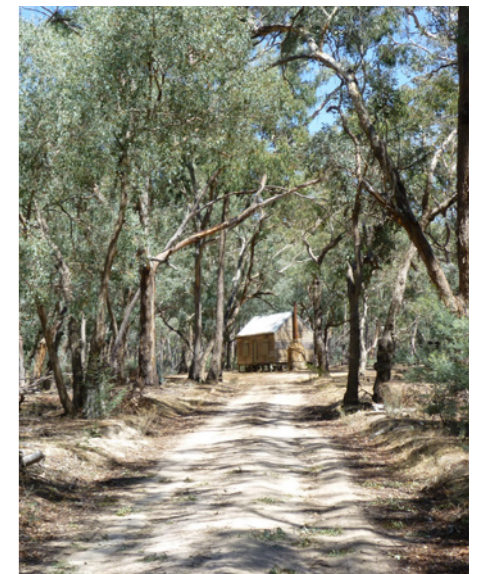


Victoria's National Parks

2010



Murray River, Gunbower National Park



Hut in St Arnaud Range National Park



Grey River, Great Otway National Park
Paul Clifton



Giant Spider Crab in Port Phillip Bay
Bryce Nichol

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Acronyms

CCV	Conservation Council of Victoria	MCA	Mountain Cattlemen's Association
CF&L	Conservation, Forests and Lands	NPA	National Parks Authority
ECC	Environment Conservation Council	NPAC	National Parks Advisory Committee
EES	Environmental Effects Statement	NPS	National Parks Service
EGC	East Gippsland Coalition	NRCL	Natural Resources Conservation League
EPBC	Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act	RAOU	Royal Australasian Ornithologists' Union
FCV	Forests Commission of Victoria	SDC	State Development Committee
FNCV	Field Naturalists Club of Victoria	SOBAC	Save Our Bushland Action Committee
FVWC	Federation of Victorian Walking Clubs	SSA	Sporting Shooters Association
LCC	Land Conservation Council	VEAC	Victorian Environment Assessment Council
LUAC	Land Utilisation Advisory Council	VNPA	Victorian National Parks Association

