



THE HISTORY OF

FRASER NATIONAL PARK

By Ron Turner

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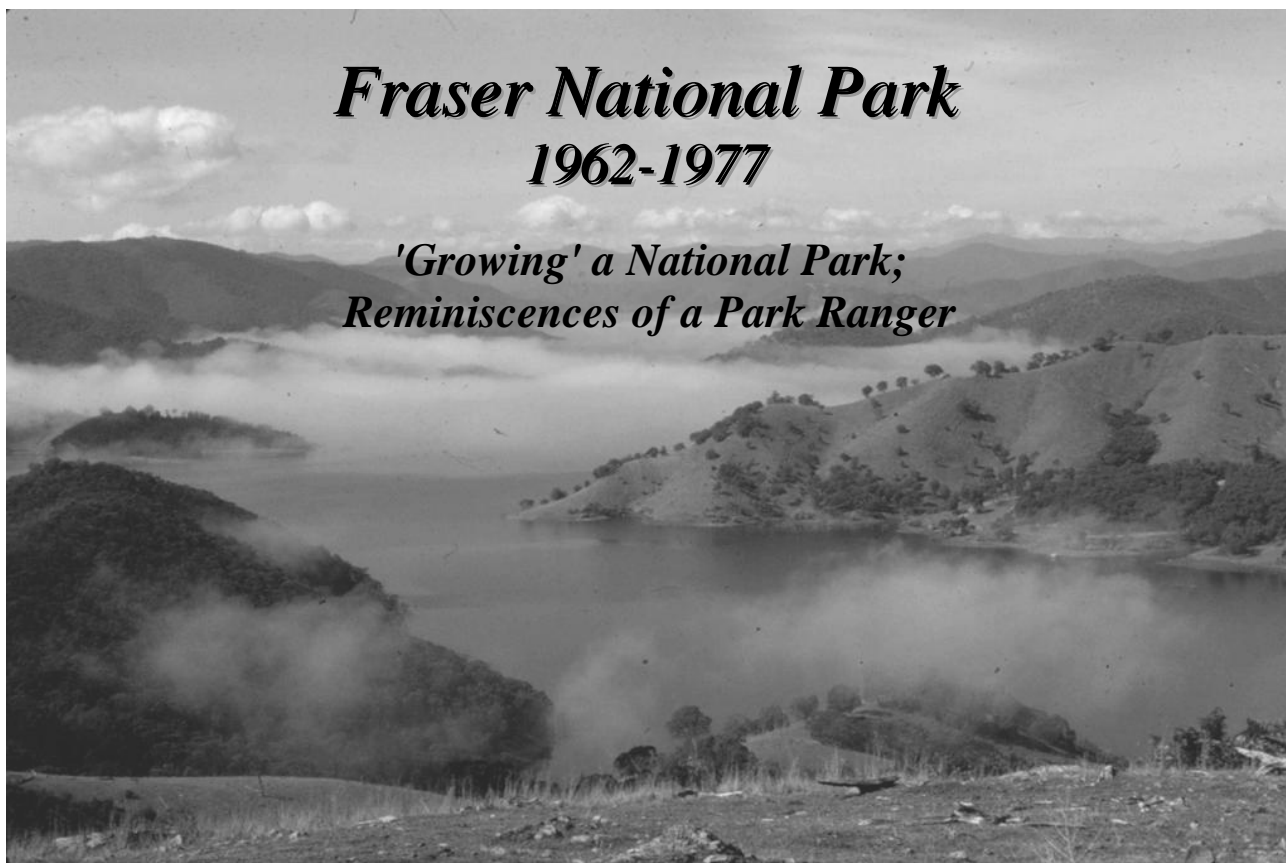
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Fraser National Park

1962-1977

'Growing' a National Park; Reminiscences of a Park Ranger



My recollections of the early years of Fraser National Park is due to the encouragement and advice of Sandra Cumming and David Hibbert. Also, the encouragement, advice and kind assistance of Geoff Edwards, and, in particular, the memory prompts and review by Graeme Foster.

Ron Turner, September 2011

* * * * *

The sound of rifle fire cracking across the valley greeted me as I stepped from my car at Haines Saddle. October 1 was my first day as a full time ranger at Fraser National Park, a recently gazetted area now totalling 7749 acres. I certainly did not appreciate – that day in 1962 - how problems associated with shooting were both ongoing and widespread. This was to continue for many years both by day and night and eventually affected my family and myself fifteen years later. The badly degraded former farmland with national park status which now confronted me could not begin to compare with the pristine wilderness of Wilsons Promontory National Park where I had formerly worked.



My wife Yvonne and I had just arrived in the district with our infant son Wayne moving into an old fibro clad timber-mill home in Lethbridge Street, Alexandra. While this house was a bit decrepit we had spent our first nine months of married life at Tidal River in two converted horse stables as used by commandos during WW2. We then moved to 'Blackwood', a two bedroom cottage nearby.

Some 12 months after arrival in Alexandra we moved down the road to a recently vacated farm house formerly owned by Mr. & Mrs Docking. Another 12 months saw us move into a brand new three bedroom house at the south western corner of Collier Bay, with its attached office.

The move to Alexandra was a sort of 'sea change' in reverse for us. I was 26 years old and had previously been working as trackman at Wilsons Promontory NP being promoted to the position of Assistant Ranger after five months. My original task there had been to excavate – alone and entirely by hand – the benched walking track which now allows visitors to hike around the hillside from the southern end of Norman Bay to Little Oberon Bay. This was followed with some months working around the Tidal River village camping area leading up to and during school holidays and maintaining other walking tracks near Darby River.

Before joining the National Parks Authority I had spent a few years on noxious animal control in the mountains of New Zealand's south island which included track and bridge construction. This particular experience had been pivotal in changing my life towards conservation management. Considering the pre-existing weed and rabbit problems facing me in this new national park the New Zealand experience proved invaluable. Before this I had completed the trades of Turning and Fitting, and Toolmaking, and almost six months in the Navy as a national serviceman.

My arrival and presence in the district was not greeted with enthusiasm. Many locals resented my presence in their 'private' hunting and drinking playground; their lifestyle was about to change. I was to find only one farmer adjoining the park was anything approaching friendly. Virtually all were hostile to the government buying far more land for the about-to-be-created Lake Eildon than was required and, here I was, a representative of government in an unwanted and despised national park. Furthermore, many of them pressed on me the anecdote that the government valuer was subjected by alcoholic 'inducement' to offer far more for the land in Collier Bay than it was worth. The commonly accepted line was that one of the land owners had claimed his best land in the valley was about to be taken, leaving him with only the steeper, poorer country so why not buy the lot? It was claimed by many the government had paid an excessive amount and this affected their land valuations and rates – hence their attitude to the park.



Much later I was to read the official government debate on the proposal to create Fraser National Park. This was rather hilarious (as much government debate often is) for the Leader of the Opposition had a field day. He referred to Minister for Water Supply Wilfred Mibus 'tripping merrily' into Premier Bolte's office and tabling a map bestowing the premier's name on one of the bays. Many other then ministers and senior public servants also had their names featured prominently on the map together with a gaggle of local land owners. (However, the best that could be done to commemorate the importance of the original selector (Merlo) in what was to become Collier Bay was perhaps an oblique reference to an 'Italian Gully' on the northern side of Cook Point). The park was named after Mr. A.J. Fraser, first chairman of the National Parks Authority.

The original declaration of Fraser National Park in 1957 did not include vacant crown land to the north west. This aerial photo shows the extent of alienated land in the new park.

The major problem with all of this, the Leader of the Opposition went on to point out, was that the 'official' Broadbent map of the area had already been published with all these names 'set in stone'. This included the boldly presented 'Fraser National Park'. The issue now was that parliament had not even debated the matter! So, yes, the local farming community had much to be off-side about.

With the creation of the national park a Fraser National Park Committee of Management had been formed. This was comprised of local people and representatives of government departments who were in some way able to offer their expertise in management and operational matters. Personnel were (in 1962), the Forester from Taggerty (John Channon), and representatives from the State Rivers and Water Supply Commission (John McAuley), Soil Conservation Authority (Mac Wood), Country Roads Board (Bill Brake), and Fisheries and Wildlife Department (Jim Wharton) from Melbourne. A further person was appointed to represent the Piscatorial Council (Nicolas Cole).

Representing local interests was a former Shire of Alexandra President Cr. H.E. FitzRoy, JP, a former Shire President) who was appointed chairman of the committee, and it was with him that I was to liaise most closely on park matters. Farmer and direct neighbour of the park on the south western side was Cr. Les Collier, also representing the Shire. Both these men stayed on the committee after retiring from council. Mr. Lin Cumming, a local apiarist and businessman was appointed to represent conservation interests. Meetings were eventually held monthly in the office attached to the house at Collier Bay.

Settling in

Many and varied 'teething problems' were associated with being the first full time ranger at Fraser National Park. I quickly realised that a distinct change in public 'cultural' attitudes towards this basically lawless area would be beneficial. However, it was not a matter of focusing my energies to this end. My physical presence in uniform and a 'softly, softly, slowly, slowly' attitude was called for, and I set about cleaning the area of rubbish, especially broken glass and discarded fishing line around the foreshore.

As the water receded even more broken glass indicated a lot of target shooting had taken place. I believe a high standard of cleanliness, particularly within the new amenities blocks, was a big turning point in public attitudes.



I initially used our private car to drive to and around the park but a few months later a new Land Rover was supplied. Soon after that a Massey Ferguson 35 tractor and a small boat arrived in 1963. I quickly realised Lake Eildon was not a safe place for a small boat in all weathers. When the Director of National Parks, Len Smith, inspected the park from the water some 'chop' came over the small windscreen and we both got damp. In 1965 a new six metre boat with enclosed cabin arrived which enabled the committee to visit other areas of the park.

It was pointed out to me the national park didn't extend down to the full supply level of Lake Eildon. The State Rivers and Water Supply Commission had retained control of a flood buffer, a strip of land between the park and the 'normal' full supply level of the lake. This land, comprising in total

1250 acres, was gazetted as the Eildon Water Reserve (EWR) and the boundary interface between the two areas was not a regular distance from the full supply level. While it seemed to complicate matters even further much of the land beneath the water within Collier Bay was also included in the reserve, as was some of the land under the water in the upper inlets of Bolte and Stone bays. This enabled an EWR committee to control foreshore lands and other normally water-covered lands as the water receded.

Gazettal of the Eildon Water Reserve allowed that committee to define, with boundary markers, a legally enforceable 5kph speed limit on boating in the western half of Collier Bay, to control and charge for boat launching and mooring fees, and to exclude duck hunting. They eventually retained the services of the Sergeant in Charge at the Alexandra police station to handle prosecutions which occurred in 'their' area. In later years access to the water for a proposed private subdivision development within the Mountaineer Creek valley was blocked because of the existence of the EWR.

Permanent boat moorings were allowed in the small bay at the south western head of Collier Bay, serviced by the old track leading to the early settlements now inundated by Lake Eildon.

The National Park Authority was far from comfortable with the dual management arrangement for it was the major provider of staff, equipment and development money. It did its utmost to amalgamate the EWR into the national park, unsuccessfully. At least I felt the committee were understanding when I was to raise issues such as potential offenders being directed to leave either area and complying by merely stepping across the boundary line, or the need for a permit to transfer a firearm across the national park, and a separate such permit to transfer the same firearm across the EWR. Strictly speaking staff were not legally entitled to collect EWR fees for boat launching whilst at the control point in the national park; some camps even straddled the boundary line.

Positive aspects of this initial 'head shaking' issue was that control of the area below the national park boundary had been given to the same personnel as the national park committee, and regulations were similar for both areas, but not entirely the same. A more complex legal matter related to fire control. While regulations for both areas were similar, there were differences, even in interpretation. The most important difference was that the national park regulations fell under the Forest Act; the EWR came under the Country Fire Authority Act and their regulations. An issue more theoretical than practical was 'who was in control of a fire on the foreshore where most public activities took place'?

The original Fraser National Park Committee of Management lost a few early appointees but, after my arrival, were to maintain stable membership (apart from changes to Forestry and State Rivers and Water Supply personnel). They were not entirely autonomous. Secretarial support (initially by Graeme McKenzie and later by John Counihan) and funding was provided by the National Parks Authority (my employer, even though I was not a public servant) who maintained a close overview via both the draft and later the confirmed minutes of both meetings. By contrast the Eildon Water Reserve Committee of Management were completely independent of the National Parks Authority.

In later years more technical support was provided from head office, mainly by Technical Officer Geoff Edwards. On one occasion the committee made a 'mind broadening' trip to view developments at Tidal River within the Wilsons Promontory National Park. After Wilsons Promontory the next busiest national park in terms of numbers of campers, and development of infrastructure, was Fraser NP.

Despite the bureaucracy involving two sets of monthly meeting agendas and two sets of minutes this quaint dual arrangement had its positive side. Revenue coming in to the Eildon Water Reserve committee would see an application for grants for improvements such as launching ramps, playgrounds, picnic areas, and barbecues to be placed on the EWR, also the clearing and burning of dead trees and stumps below the full supply level. Such grants were not available to the National Parks Authority.

As the EWR had no separate secretarial support all of this work was handled by the National Parks Authority. All EWR revenue was officially spent in the Eildon Water Reserve; it was not lost to any head office or bureaucratic overheads. However, at times, the EWR committee would give grants to the national park for some specific project. This would often be in the form of wages or underwriting various development projects within the park.

Permission would be sought to place national park equipment such as pumps, pipes, and the boat pontoon on the Eildon Water Reserve and would be more or less automatically approved with the request and approval recorded in the respective set of minutes. Often there would be an urgent need for materials such as extra lengths of water piping as the lake receded at Devil Cove, or staffing for special purposes. If funds from the National Parks Authority had already been allocated for other purposes, or expended, the matter would be held over from the initial national park meeting and later approved and funded by the EWR committee in their meeting.

One area of disagreement occurred in later years when burgan scrub started to spread rather alarmingly. The National Parks Authority, renamed as the National Parks Service in 1971, recognised that many farmers viewed the plant as a noxious weed with a potential to rapidly cover the area with a dense almost impenetrable cover. However, they finally decreed that the plant was to be left alone. Acceding to this direction and despite the private thoughts of the Fraser National Park committee the same personnel comprising the independent Eildon Water Reserve committee saw it as a pest and a fire risk, and spent some of their money on control within the EWR.

In addition to holding a 'warrant' for the National Parks Authority, I was given an 'authority' for the Eildon Water Reserve and, in addition, the positions of Honorary Forest Officer and Bailiff of Crown Lands. These legal powers were necessary when encountering the many instances of shooting, fire lighting or rubbish dumping on foreshores that occurred especially in the Stone Bay area. In this context I would, on occasions, need to provide proof of where an offence had occurred. I handled this by by contacting the State Rivers for an accurate lake height. Allowing for the slope, I would then measure from the water's edge to determine the high water mark, then further up the slope to the EWR/FNP interface boundary and so determine where some incident had occurred, even if it was clear to me on the ground such incident had occurred within either the EWR or national park.

This, then, was the scene when, some two years after arriving in the district, we moved into a new 3 bedroom brick veneer home with attached office near the head of Collier Bay with Wayne and our new son, Neale. There was also a two bay garage and workshop where a diesel generator supplied electricity in the morning and at night. Our refrigerator, initially operated by kerosene, was converted to LP Gas. Water was collected off the roof into 2 x 5000gallon tanks with a 600 gallon overhead tank for pressure.

The move to Collier Bay provided a sound base for future developments. It also meant that I was on duty virtually 24 hours a day and, if I wasn't there, Yvonne would be answering increasing numbers of people at the door, or telephone, and eventually the two way radio. Fee collection was becoming a major part of my work.

Monthly meetings were held within the small office attached to our new home ensuring no build up of papers or dust in the room. I had no experience of working within a committee system but this closer relationship allowed me to bounce ideas off various committeemen, or seek their reactions to various issues that arose, or background attitudes within the community. The committee purchased a dozen stacking chairs, an electric urn and cups and saucers for their use during meetings.

Developments at Fraser

The basic network of roads within the park (*as seen here in 1963*) was in place when we arrived in 1962. Some of the original construction had been recorded photographically by committeeman Lin



Cumming. It was possible to access what became the Lakeside and Devil Cove areas, and the site of the first launching ramp which was to be located below to the lower car park at mid left. As traffic built up it was necessary to firstly widen and then seal the roads. The original Devil's Cove Road down into the valley east of Haines Saddle was still used by a few visitors. Its extension to Stone's hut can be seen crossing the ridge at centre right. However, after some incidents (and accidents) this old track was closed to the public, as was the track into Stone's old hut and the Perfect Cure Creek.

In 1964 the Country Roads Board representative on the committee, Bill Brake, advised of a proposal from the Eildon Development Committee to link Eildon to Bonnie Doon via a new road extending the existing road around Collier Bay. The FNP committee preferred the concept for such a road to use the ridge along the western catchment of Collier Bay, north from Haines Saddle. After due investigation by the National Parks Service the ridge road was approved and constructed and became known as the Skyline Road. This increased the number of apprehensions for illegal spotlight shooting within the park, despite large national park signs at either end. At one stage a proposal was advanced to excise the road from the national park and fence both sides.

An interesting situation developed with the proposal to build the Skyline Road. Instead of utilising a section of existing crown road reserve for hundreds of metres near the northern end it was decided to place the proposed road within the more lightly timbered national park parallel to and on the east of the road reserve. The rationale for this decision was to both preserve and protect a good stand of large red stringybark trees. Road construction left the untouched strip within the road reserve but fenced into a neighbouring property and I was to eventually report on the rubbing and rather rapid ringbarking of those trees by cattle. Requests to the manager and owner to exclude the cattle or move the fence proved fruitless.

I believed, with temporary manpower available at the time, that I could move the relevant section of fence from its eastern boundary to the western side of the reserve and my proposal was approved. A potentially sensitive issue could be the accurate reinstatement of the fence along the western boundary. I recall my relief at a bend on the northern end when digging down for a new strainer post and seeing the steadily diminishing taper of an old survey peg not obvious above the ground. All I had for precise relocation was a hand held compass, measuring tape and a property plan. The fence was re-erected in its new location and left in better condition than its previous condition.

The Eildon Water Reserve committee discussed the possibility of extending the Devils Cove Road to a small deep inlet on the north side of Collier Bay. Fluctuations in the water level of the lake tended to create problems for the owners of many boats moored at the south-western corner of Collier Bay. I was never personally comfortable with the proposal believing the road was going to be an awful scar on the landscape.

At the next monthly meeting the matter was brought up within the FNP committee which, in turn, presented a proposal to the National Parks Service. The road was constructed during the winter (1964) utilising manpower and equipment from the Forest Service at Taggerty. All moored boats were then moved from the south western corner of Collier Bay to the end of the new road. This was named Wallaby Bay. The road, constructed almost entirely on national park, was directed almost wholly at facilitating EWR activities. The turn-around/car park at roads end was on the national park and it was agreed to provide vehicular access to the water for short term parking associated with loading or unloading boats, but not long term parking. A toilet block was to be built here also.

(The existing scar is nothing compared with that threatened by an earlier proposal to construct a two way road to Cook Point and encourage private development there. I sensed the National Parks Authority were not comfortable with that proposal and decided a greater priority was to allocate funding to widen and seal existing roads prior to any discussion about further extensions).

Maintenance of the internal gravel roads using the tractor and grader blade was initially carried out by myself, and, when it was raining, by use of a shovel and wet weather clothing watching for and turning running water from the road surface and keeping culverts open. The condition of the gravel roads were a source of some pride to me.

In 1965 the ring road was widened at Lakeside to provide access for camp development and construction of a new amenities block. At about this time also a new 4wd fire break track was opened to give access to Bolte Bay. This was followed soon after by the steep fire break providing 4wd access from Italian Gully to Mountaineer Creek. Access into these outer areas of the park was necessary not only for fire control purposes but for work on vermin and noxious weeds, and for patrolling. I would often park my Land Rover well back from the water and quietly walk the areas on foot to the surprise of some visitors who might have only expected me to visit by water.

Initial visitor contact was random and took place wherever visitors were found. As traffic built up, and in an effort to assume control, either Fred Radford or myself would stop vehicles at Haines Saddle and ask the more or less standard and formal 'Have you any cats, dogs or firearms' question. The committee inspected sites for a more permanent control point in 1967/68 finally settling on modifying the road junction at the head of Collier Bay. The road was widened here and an island entrance station built with connections for a two way radio and fluorescent lights powered by a portable generator. It was established as a public contact point for collection of fees, to answer queries and give directions.

It was often quite comical when, in answer to the 'any cats, dogs or firearms' query a driver would occasionally say 'no cats, except her' and point to the female passenger, sometimes miaowing. Or, it would be 'no dogs, but she's (pointing to the passenger) a bitch'. Often the driver would pay the fee and drive off leaving us to listen to the diminishing sounds of the frequent heated debate that followed. There was the occasion, fortunately not repeated, when a Mr 'X' (who we knew well) responded to Fred Radford's query about 'cats, dogs or firearms' saying "no cats and no dogs, but I have this" taking out a (legal) pistol and pointing it at Fred's head! He was allowed entry!

We always knew we were in for an argument when we spotted a Queensland registered vehicle approaching. Drivers of these vehicles frequently refused to pay saying they didn't pay to enter national parks in Queensland, and would turn around and leave rather than pay the 30 cents. The more expensive the car the worse the situation seemed to get. On the other hand we were often to find that a driver with an old car filled with children seemed much more appreciative and would readily pay the fee.

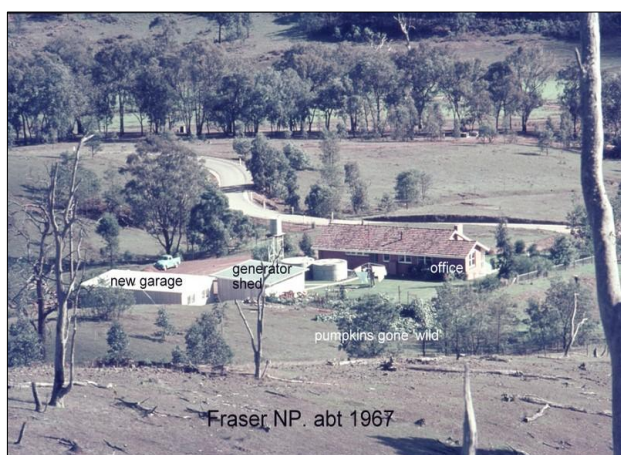
On the occasions of holidays or long weekends we would operate this small island office well into the night by use of a small generator. Graeme Foster was on duty on one such occasion when he spotted a man walking unsteadily and weaving his way down the road. The man staggered past the office without saying anything, disappearing again into the darkness. Next morning, the man reappeared and sought assistance in recovering his car which had gone over the road edge. The vehicle was an MG sports model with soft top and, turning over as it left the road, it appeared the hood had saved the driver who was able to clamber out unhurt. Remarkably, the vehicle had suffered little damage but became a write off as it was dragged upside down back to the sealed road above. Undoubtedly the driver would go on to say he 'swerved to miss a kangaroo'.

Graeme also reminds me of many other incidents. Very fast cars would occasionally go past the checkpoint without stopping only to return moments later seeking instructions on access to Bonnie Doon. On one occasion, after dark, a vehicle towing a boat with an extremely high canopy approached from the Haines Saddle direction. Graeme stopped the driver informing him the boat wasn't going to fit under the control point roof and he would have to go around. The driver proceeded to reverse, straight into a car that had come in behind. Solicitors became involved until it was pointed out the driver of the reversing vehicle did not have any side mirrors, and it was his obligation to check before reversing. On yet other occasions we would get speedsters coming out of the Devil Cove area. They would cross the double lines below the new control centre and speed uphill past the centre using the downhill lanes.



There was a relatively new besser block dry-pit toilet near the head of Collier Bay when I arrived in 1962. Rather odorous, an early task was to provide a water supply to enable this to be converted to a septic system by local tradesmen Webster and Hickmott.

An early view from 'our' house showing the original toilet block and water tanks. Snowfalls did occur, but were not common.



A pump was installed below and slightly west of the toilet. Piping connected it to two 1000 gallon water tanks, and reticulated back to the toilet. I then excavated trenches by hand both easterly and westerly and installed garden hose to provide water at low pressure to small picnic areas. Variable water levels in the lake indicated this arrangement couldn't be more than a temporary measure. A bore was drilled near the toilet block (left of the two tanks seen above) and this provided another short term water supply.

Local builders Webster and Hickmott were contracted to build 'our' new house and, soon after, two new identical amenities blocks at Lakeside (1967) and Devil Cove (1968) respectively. One ton gas tanks were installed to provide hot water and lighting. I had to obtain a weekly reading of the volume of remaining gas.

There were many strict regulations relating to the placement of these tanks. Tankers coming in to refill could only drive in and complete a turning circle; they were not allowed to reverse. These amenities blocks complete with hot water quickly drew a large increase in visitation but the more subtle change – in my eyes, at least – was to see family oriented groups coming rather than the male dominated fishing fraternity.

A major attempt – for the time - to provide water for developments across the whole southern side of Collier Bay saw a 3hp motor and jet pump installed to access the deeper water in Stockyard Bay in 1966-67. Water was pumped southerly around this small bay and up the hill to a new 30,000 gallon concrete tank. This water was then reticulated easterly by Fred Radford and myself to the proposed Lakeside Camping area, and westerly to the head of Collier Bay with a branch up to my house.

The principle of a jet pump was to pump water down a length of 4" pipe and around a venturi jet. The water then travelled back up a second such pipe past the pump and up the hill to the tank. The small petrol motor provided didn't have the capacity to run for the long hours in all temperatures and created many problems for me at peak times. Replacement motors, then larger petrol motors were supplied in following years until, finally, a diesel motor was installed. This unit tended to be overpowered and, as it wasn't operating under full load, created its own problems. Much of the 2" reticulation piping was installed by repeatedly ripping behind the tractor, then physically pulling the pipe beneath the loosened ground by means of a metal loop and cap screwed onto a polythene end connector on the point of a rabbit ripper. My growing son Wayne would often assist me with cutting and joining the polythene pipe extensions.

There was a slow awakening within the district community that the national park was creating work. Fred Radford, a local man, was appointed full time to assist me operate the park. A likeable, easy going ex serviceman he had formerly worked part time at peak periods prior to my arrival. A former shire engineer was employed to supervise major construction works. Several young university students were employed at peak periods to handle toilet cleaning and rubbish removal. All of this was having a very positive effect on local business people who sought permits to supply various goods to the campers. The UT Creek road leading to the park was progressively improved by widening and later by sealing to carry the increasing and sometimes heavy traffic while the road from Haines Saddle to Collier Bay also had to be widened prior to sealing.



Photo: looking towards Haines Saddle at mid right.

The provision of 240 volt electricity was a great leap forward for us personally in its availability 24 hours a day, and not having to put up with the restricted use and noise of a diesel generator in the workshop. A limit to the amount of electricity available was imposed which would allow for domestic use

plus power to service a proposed kiosk, but not for a full scale camping area.

A rocket was fired – as seen here in 1966 – with a line attached, somewhat akin to early rescues of shipwrecked mariners from around our coastline, and the single wire winched across the valleys and erected on poles. This type of electricity supply line is known as a single wire earth return line, or SWER line.

The first launching ramp was constructed by workmen from the Alexandra Shire under the supervision of Shire Engineer Lew Ton. A rapid rise in the lake saw each concrete slab covered within a day or two of pouring, which was ideal for curing the concrete. The building of the ramp was to prove rather fortuitous not long after when a float plane, landing in Coller Bay, holed one of its pontoons. The roaring sound of the hard working motor indicated just how lucky the pilot of the plane had been as it taxied across the bay needing extra power to exit the water with its water logged pontoon. At the ramp the pilot asked if I could telephone the Civil Aviation Authority on his behalf. Not having encountered such a matter before I was perplexed when they asked me was it 'an incident, or an accident'. They despatched an investigator to personally check what had happened.

Various government unemployment schemes were utilised at different periods over the years and, at times, there were several local men on the payroll involved in a variety of works. Some names I recall include Angus Simpson, Lee Stickels and Wally Blencoe. While different staff were involved in sign construction for other parks Wally, a visually impaired person, was eventually employed on this task on a full time basis. Greg Goschnik, brothers Mark and Robert Paul, Jack Coppinger (who had been a Patrol Officer in Papua New Guinea and went on to work within other parks in Vic., N.T. and Qld) was making pre-fabricated toilets for other parks. Joe and Dianne? (who married while they were working at the park) and brothers Mike and Gil Field (who went on to work in interpretation within Qld. and WA national parks departments and Dennis Doyle were others. Fred Radford would often bring some of these men to work in his own car. Some of these casual staff were appointed full time in later years; others I could have done without.

I lined out a new Candlebark Nature Trail and this was developed and the gravel path formed by use of wheelbarrows (1968). At that time it was one of only a few such trails within the national parks of Victoria. A walking track to Point Mead was constructed followed by another similar benched track to Cook Point, all by hand work. Here again the Eildon Water Reserve Committee would underwrite the wages paid for this work when official schemes cut out. The Cook Point track was later extended around the foreshore to Stone Bay also using EWR funds.



Left: Sandra Cumming, Mrs Cumming, myself, unknown.

Afternoon tea on the 'esplanade' in front of the evolving Devils Cove camping area with lots of new trees showing.

A larger works area and shed was constructed along the old access road and we were able to take on extra works for other parks such as sign construction and making pre-fabricated single and double toilets. A small cottage was transported in from Ferntree Gully as accommodation for full

time staff. It almost didn't arrive as, before leaving, it was not issued with a certificate to show it was free of rat infestation. Another staff house was then built in the same area. An incinerator was

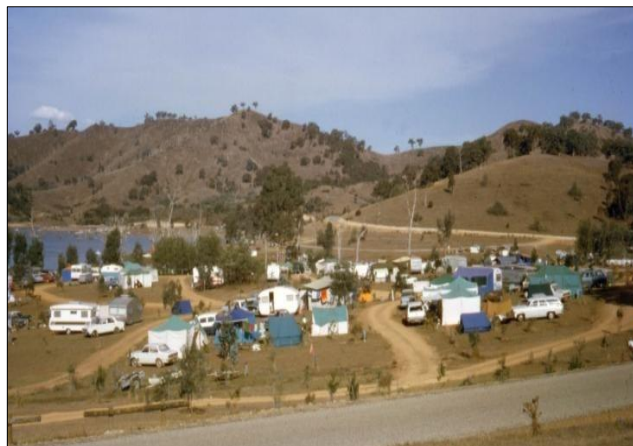
constructed for burning rubbish as an old gravel 'borrow pit' beside the original access track became full. I had a lucky escape here on one occasion when I had opened the incinerator door and an aerosol can exploded sending a sheet of flame outwards, without harm to me.

The second amenities block at Devil Cove also needed a separate water supply and another 30,000 gallon concrete tank was built. A brand new camping area was suggested below the amenities block and my plans for a layout across this grassland area were adopted. The problems associated with retaining camping sites on the foreshore at Lakeside were avoided and an 'esplanade' of sorts left above the full supply level.

***Right: The recently established Devils Cove
Camping Area about 1970***

Both photos by L. Cumming, courtesy
S. Cumming.

Using unemployment labour, water pipes were installed under what were to become roadways. I placed seedling trees on the ground to eventually grow into 'barriers' between sites and the unemployed men planted them complete with stakes and tree guards. A local contractor then spread gravel from the Devil's Cove area which we then levelled and graded to form roadways based on a one- way traffic system. A visitor went on to write an article entitled 'Growing a National Park' in the November 1969 issue of 'The Riverlander' magazine.



The water supply pump at Devil Cove was installed on the high water mark but when the lake fell Fred Radford and I had to drag the pump and motor by hand across the mud and splice in extra suction and delivery pipe. At one stage I had hundreds of feet of suction pipe extending out into slightly deeper water as the mud was too soft to support the vibrations of an operating pump. It was here I learned much about the perils of air leaking into the suction pipe via different fittings. This occasionally caused the pipe to float and be damaged by boat propellers. Hand priming those pipe extensions was a tedious procedure.



***Pipes were extended across these mud flats in an
effort to maintain the water supply to Devils Cove.***

About 1966 the level of Lake Eildon fell revealing the former ploughing activity - and the legacy of past land use practices. The depth of newly deposited silt across the flats ranged from 100 mm to 150mm, sometimes more, in a mere 10 years. As the water receded the silt dried and clover germinated on the original soil surface now showing at the bottom of cracks in the drying mud.

A much lower tender for the Candlebark amenities block was accepted by the FNP committee. A major problem for me personally was an incorrect use of sealant used during installation of gas equipment for the showers as the sealant kept blocking the extremely fine filters and thus reducing

gas pressure. This led to poor performance in the gas water heating equipment and went on to create much frustration and wasted time on my behalf trying to maintain the system. Gas from the one-ton tank at Devils Cove was extended by pipe to service the Candlebark block but, during installation, conditions were just too wet in the creek bed. On-going leaks along the pipe became evident when the lake refilled. That pipe was abandoned and another gas tank was finally installed at Candlebark. There were some residual trees in the Candlebark area but the camping sites were defined and water supply within the camping area installed in a similar manner to Devil's Cove.

The Eildon Water Reserve committee provided treated pine barriers to restrict vehicular access to the water's edge. Many were the drivers who would attempt to park on the water's edge of a falling lake and it was a source of embarrassment to me when I was instructed not to tow these people out due to legal issues. I was to overcome the problem somewhat by saying to drivers of bogged cars that I 'couldn't get there for about two hours' by which time virtually all had extracted themselves. Of course there were others who were 'in a hurry' and paid for a tow truck from Alexandra. It was difficult not to assist some visitors – particularly those with young children - and these occasions generally remained an 'unspoken and unofficial' matter. The Committee instruction was not a unanimous one with country committee members disagreeing strongly with the city based government representative members, but the issue was officially 'resolved' by the National Park Service who owned the Land Rover and tractor we used.

Fred Radford and I were not the experts in all manner of operations. On one occasion we bogged the tractor during stump clearing operations near the launching ramp. We brought the Land Rover in to assist, and promptly got that bogged also. We were to learn – the hard way – that a firm looking surface close to or below the high water mark might conceal an almost liquid mud underneath. On this occasion the tow truck almost got bogged also. After that we stayed well away from other bogged vehicles.

A exploratory enquiry was made from the Mt. Buffalo NP to see if we might be interested in swapping our Land Rover for a short wheel base Toyota. Despite the unflattering comments from the Ranger at Mt. Buffalo I agreed to the swap. There weren't many of these vehicles on the road and it drew much interest from campers one of whom worked for the Toyota company in Melbourne. He was to assist with problems relating to new but incorrect spare parts being received. It proved to be an awful vehicle travelling on the highway to Melbourne often leaving me with a headache, but its extra power was handy for working around the hills.

I once travelled to Melbourne and collected an old long wheel base Land Rover that had been used at Mallacoota National Park then heading across the suburbs to Pentridge Prison. This was to be a second vehicle to provide short-term assistance with extra unemployed staff prior to its disposal. In the head office I was told, rather flippantly, "the tyres are bald, the brakes are shot and the steering is loose but, don't worry, you are insured"! What I wasn't told was that, when loaded, it was possible to see the inner tube through a slash in a front tyre sidewall, and the spare was useless.

I recall the clanging of those big steel prison doors behind me, the vehicle search by guards, and instructions by a guard seemingly twice my size to stay inside the vehicle. Then there was the clanging of a second set of steel doors and being directed to drive to where a group of tough looking men were peremptorily told to load the vehicle. The guard with me pointed out various unsavoury looking characters saying "See that one, he's in for murder; that one is in for rape, that one over there is in for multiple murder". These men threw rolls of netting at the shuddering vehicle and loaded the tray until the vehicle sagged badly at the rear.

Those remarks in head office were to haunt me as I was sent out into the traffic with the sound of

the closure of the big steel doors reverberating in my ears. Someone had badly miscalculated the weight of the load. The steering was awful and I made a decision to leave part of the load at the Fisheries and Wildlife depot along Footscray Road 'crawling' around back roads to get there before travelling home at night in a high state of nervousness. In those days one just got the job done, and talked about it afterwards.

This trip into the notorious Pentridge prison in its 'working days' actually gave me a perverse sort of bragging stance which I was to use on odd occasions. Years later I was about to be introduced to a stranger who cut in saying "I know you from somewhere. Whereabouts have I met you before?" To which I responded honestly, but perhaps cheekily - "Well, I've been in Pentridge!", then found out the stranger was a politician! Oops!

Pentridge netting was well known and esteemed for its quality and these rolls of netting were taken up onto the hills in the park where different areas were fenced to exclude residual rabbits and plant seedling trees, particularly on the northern side of Blowhard, and above the Lakeside area. Virtually all the seedling plants would invariably come from the Natural Resources Association in Springvale. I germinated many seeds myself in a seed raising box at home.

Days of high visitation would often see me on duty at the car park adjacent to the launching ramp. Congestion here was increasingly noticeable and frustrating for visitors wishing to launch their boats. If necessary I would collect car parking and launching fees (initially \$0-30 each), direct drivers where to park to untie and otherwise prepare their boats, then advise when to launch. With a little advice and encouragement, and co-operation, it was possible to launch two boats at a time. The EWR committee saw the need for another ramp, but the options were not good. They eventually opted to install the second concrete ramp just before the Candlebark camping area (1976) although the slope did limit parking.

The EWR committee received a request to allow the filming in Wallaby Bay of a sequence of 'No. 96', a popular television soapie. The general plot included a 'den of villains' on a houseboat and, at one stage, a speeding power boat was to crash into it at high speed. Behind the scenes pontoons were prepared with special fittings. Onto the deck one wall of a houseboat was constructed using balsa timbers. Both our boys were at the stage of making model aeroplanes and were suitably impressed at the vast quantities of this material being used.

The day of the filming arrived and, on cue, the speedboat rounded the point and came into the bay heading directly for the 'houseboat'. On impact, the marvellous men behind the scenes 'pulled the plugs' to allow the pontoons to fill rapidly with water concurrently with a sheet of 'flame' and the 'houseboat' started to sink. While the 'vessel' was supposed to sink quickly and dramatically the trick didn't work quite as well as planned. Later, when the compressors on shore were started, air was used via pre-connected piping to refloat the whole, by now, shambles. My boys gleefully collected odd pieces of balsa that had escaped the clean up and drifted away.

While the committee were keen to see a kiosk and cafe developed in the general vicinity of the first launching ramp agreement with the National Parks Authority could not be reached on a suitable site and the proposal just 'lost steam'.

Camping at Fraser

In 1962 visitors camped wherever they so desired, often right on the water's edge. Collier Bay, for many, was merely the access point for fishing and shooting, or for exploring the seemingly limitless

waters of the lake. Camping fees were set and I began a face to face involvement with visitors most of whom I found to be great people. My wife Yvonne and I went on over the years to establish long-term friendships with some of these visitors.

What became the Lakeside camping area was always a popular spot for camping as the gravel banks gave reasonably good safe launching. It also gave immediate access into deep water for water skiing and avoided the speed restrictions applied at the head of the bay. To develop the 'Lakeside' camping area in 1967 a circular main road system was expanded. The committee adopted the recommendations of engineers to route traffic in an anti-clockwise direction as some visitors were experiencing trouble in towing caravans and boats up the steep slope in a clockwise direction especially prior to the road being sealed. Bulk gas tankers also had problems going up this hill after starting from standstill. The traffic flow caused much confusion, as it was contrary to the normal direction of traffic flow on 'keep left' systems.



Access tracks were then lined through the bush area and these and adjacent camp sites cleared by hand and use of our tractor. A new gravel pit was opened beside the access road adjacent to the entrance to the bushland. Top soil from this site was stockpiled and later used for restoration. The older pit some 50 metres away (*seen at left in this 1963 view looking towards Devils Cove*) did not have a stockpile of topsoil and was more difficult to restore despite repeated attempts with diversion banks, grass seeding and tree planting.

After construction of the three amenities blocks a second day visitor toilet block was built near the first launching ramp on the southern side of Collier Bay. Welcome swallows adopted this quieter building as a perfect place to nest leading to a lot of extra cleaning. In following years I would visit the building after dark with lots of noise, flashing a torch about until the birds decided to go elsewhere. Yet another toilet block was proposed at the mooring harbour but this was deferred until usage warranted construction and yet another water supply system.

The three amenities blocks were all based on LP Gas and this called for an evening light up of gas lights, and an early morning turn off. Insect damage to the mantles was an ongoing nuisance during warmer months requiring constant replacement of mantles. Both of these visits would involve a 'tidy up', as distinct from the daily or twice daily major clean.

The most positive change was to see family groups enjoying the area. With this came a better visitor attitude. Perhaps the biggest worry for me was the strong pro-camp fire attitude of committeeman and Taggerty Forester, Keith Jerome (who replaced Jack Channon). I was often astounded where visitors lit fires and felt obliged to push the fire regulations heavily recommending the use of established fireplace facilities. Another change was the increasing noise level as scores of high powered power boats churned up the waters of the lake. On calm days this noise was obvious at our house and, when an easterly breeze occurred, a layer of oil from outboard motors would be deposited on the water line of the park boat moored below the house well inside the restricted speed zone.

Interestingly, the Temporary Camping Area at the south west head of Collier Bay had 25 defined sites and was to remain 'temporary' for our fifteen years at Fraser. It was based on the original toilet

block. The provision of the new amenities blocks gave a total of 365 defined camp sites. These were generally defined by concrete test cores painted white on top with an appropriate number in blue facing into the centre of the site.

Camping quickly became very popular and a booking system was put in place for school and public holiday periods. What developed was a huge increase in mail coming in and corresponding replies going out. Mrs Dulcie Peters, another local person, was employed full time for many years and her secretarial work in the office was invaluable to me and helped 'protect' Yvonne from frequent interruptions.

Demand for sites became so intense at peak periods all sites were eventually balloted prior to acceptance of a booking fee with the application. Perhaps the one exception to this system was my unspoken allowance of one or two camping sites for two water police who were often rostered on duty over the Christmas and Easter periods to enforce water safety and speeding regulations. Brian Shaw and Harry Sparks always preferred the relatively quieter 'Temporary' camping area, especially when they brought families along. I'm sure their highly visible presence in enforcing water speed limits in the western half of Collier Bay (and elsewhere) helped instil a feeling of safety and security amongst campers. It certainly added to my sense of 'support if needed'. They were initially provided with a 'Bartender' boat for patrol purposes. Designed for rough water in the northern hemisphere they gave no protection from the elements at all.

The heavy demand for camp sites also created an enormous problem for staff, but mainly for myself. Each of the amenity blocks was sited without any real soil testing for dispersal by soakage of liquid wastes. I was to find this out many times the hard way, sometimes 'after hours' with no other assistance, digging down to find the soakage pipes and clear blockages thus relieving built up pressure onto the ground surface. It was rather unpleasant, to say the least, and it would take many hours for the odour to leave my arms despite immediate washing in detergent in the laundries after the event. The best I could do on the ground surface was to spread lime.

I believed the problem was due to plumbers who merely worked out a rate of fall for the disposal pipes and dug a straight line trench between two points not taking into account the bumps and hollows along the line. Under pressure following an increase in camping, liquid wastes exited onto the ground at the low spots while the longer high areas were dry and hard. It was apparent the trenches were not working as desired or expected. It could only happen with hundreds of visitors around!

Seeking advice, I was to dig many soakage test holes and measure the fall of water in each. I spent some time in theoretical calculations of the efficacy of different ways of handling the problem. I worked out the volume of water a trench could hold with the traditional agriculture pipe and gravel. I calculated the volume of water that could be held within the interstices of different size gravel. Inverted concrete drain pipes of box cross section held the most liquid, but were the most expensive, even without gravel. Corrugated galvanized fluming used by the Country Roads Board to take water down fill batters was good, but also very expensive.

I presented my findings to the committee, in particular that, at Lakeside, I had discovered what was apparently an underground seam of gravel from which water continued to soak away freely. The dispersal pipes were extended into this zone and we relied on the water testing by State Rivers and Water Supply Commission officers at different points within Collier Bay and at taps to alert us if further measures were necessary.

The next block to fail was Devils Cove. However, by this time I had made a trip to Queensland

where I saw what I thought was the 'answer to my prayers'. It was a half round corrugated plastic ReIn drain 'pipe' made specifically for soakage trenches. It took me some time and many enquiries to locate a plumbing store in Melbourne which not only knew what I was taking about, but actually had some in stock. At Devils Cove I had staff hand-dig new trenches pegged every three metres at the appropriate rate of fall and used this new and, to me, revolutionary drain 'pipe'. My concept was the whole surface length of a sub-surface trench must be equally utilised by liquid wastes to disperse away.

In an era well before computers Graeme Foster assisted greatly with the development of a system of 'sorter cards'. This called for one card of about 6" by 5" for each of the numbered camp sites onto which we would write the details of the applicant with a cross reference to the permit when fees were paid. We cut specific identical notches along the card edge to represent individual camping areas. Other notches were cut around the 'calendar edge' coinciding with the dates for which each site was booked.

By use of a steel knitting needle I could quickly ascertain the availability of sites by camping area and, or, by date. If, for example, a visitor wished to camp at Lakeside I would insert a metal knitting needle into the appropriate position for Lakeside and all those notched cards for that camping area would fall out. By then inserting the needle into the appropriate dates requested within the Lakeside cards we could quickly ascertain what sites were available, or go on to check what sites were available in other individual camp areas for those dates. So often we had to explain the system to amazed visitors who could not believe the speed with which we could respond to their enquiries.

While I was often hard pressed to maintain services the Committee were supportive in employing temporary assistance. Local university students proved invaluable to me over some years for, after an initial introduction to our operations they could go straight to any required position at various holiday periods without further instruction. In addition to Graeme Foster others of note were Roger Coates (who went on to become a medical specialist), and Mark Peters, who went into engineering.

Living on site with an attached office meant frequent 'out of paid hours' involvement with many inane interruptions from campers who, for example, had left their matches or tent pegs behind, or needed to use a telephone. Yvonne remembers the many interruptions, especially one when she was bathing the baby and a camper came around to the rear door wanting a camping permit. Late night telephone calls with all manner of requests even settling friendly arguments among drinkers in local hotels eventually led to the provision of an unlisted phone. This number was, of course, known to police and other emergency organisations.

The dramatic increase in visitation gave rise to a good deal of revenue to be accounted for via receipts. There were some 13 different types of revenue mainly for the national park but including the Eildon Water Reserve with its fees for daily and annual launching, and mooring. All of these needed to be accounted for separately. Of interest was the accounting for gas used to obtain hot showers. Gas meters had to be read weekly from within the shower cubicle and money received at the rear of each shower meter was used to check how the meter was operating. One of the university students (Roger Coates) used to amaze me with his ability to count and remember the amount of money from several individual meters without recording the meters individually, as I did. At times there would be hundreds of dollars in five cent coins spread across the office desk from the eighteen showers and six laundry tubs. Weighing the coins gave a rough check as the accuracy of the count. All monies were transported to the A.N.Z. bank at Alexandra mostly by myself and without mishap.

An interesting off-shoot related to fee collection was the sometimes frustrating reconciliation of money and receipts. I raised the matter of my occasional inability to 'balance the books' weekly with

the committee. Most times there was a slight surplus of money; sometimes it would be short. They were normally minor amounts. The committee left the matter to me as officially such a matter should not occur and the matter was not minuted. On the basis of this I established an 'ESP' tin (short for 'Error Some Place') which was kept in the safe. If we could not balance the accounts after three attempts money in the ESP tin was used; if we had surplus cash it went into the tin. If we were short we would say 'where's the ESP tin' and the money came out of the tin. In time we were able to pinpoint the source of frustration trying to balance the books being due to visitors paying at the entrance station, realising cars were waiting behind and asking rapid fire questions, then driving off without their change. Different people collecting money was another recognised weakness.

Camping was discouraged in other areas beyond Collier Bay mainly because of rubbish and the high risk of fires which tended to be left burning on departure. At times visitors coming ashore from house boats would be involved in shooting or lighting large camp fires and leaving piles of litter. My highly visible early morning or late evening presence either by boat, or vehicle and often by foot along the foreshore saw a diminution of these activities. I did observe discreetly a noticeable change in behaviour over the years with many of these boating people especially, as the waters receded. There was a change from dropping rubbish over the side to occasionally hiding their rubbish behind trees to collecting and removing existing foreshore litter.

At one stage a local contractor was engaged to empty rubbish bins and collect loose rubbish within some 20 metres of roadways (which detail wasn't pushed too hard). The Christmas lunch period would generally see all staff go home for their lunch leaving myself as the only person on duty. I didn't find this an onerous duty as it was 'self imposed' but it is interesting to reflect that, over the years, Christmas lunch became a rather meaningless occasion for me. Actually, Christmas Day within the camping areas tended to be a quiet, relaxed day while behavioural irregularities tended to come to the fore on New Year's eve.

It would have been about 1970 that local community attitudes towards the park changed noticeably. Lake Eildon and our concrete launching ramp together with new amenities blocks drew thousands of visitors; several hundred day visitors would visit on good days. There were 365 odd defined camp sites so popular they had to be balloted in advance. The park had become a major employer in the area particularly at peak visitor times and during unemployment schemes. A large banner was erected across Alexandra's main intersection reading "Welcome to Alexandra, Gateway To Fraser National Park". I felt we 'had come of age'.

There was a group of friends who camped in the area with whom both Yvonne and I got on well. Many of them were businessmen who had travelled overseas and slide nights would be held in our lounge squeezing some 20 or more persons in to see magnificent European cathedrals, or mountains, or fiords. At times I would show photos of my time in the alpine areas of the South Island of New Zealand, or of national parks. These were great nights followed by the 'bring a plate' supper.

Committeeman Jim Wharton (Deputy Director of the Fisheries and Wildlife Dept.) had also travelled overseas and suggested an outdoor theatre be established. This was constructed in the gully immediately down slope of the office in 1969. Seating comprised seven rows of three logs each raised off the ground on chocks. A heavy duty 240 volt lead was inserted in a polythene pipe which was subsequently buried terminating at a vertical post on which a projector was placed with screen behind. A program of scheduled talks was displayed throughout the camping areas.



Speakers included Jim Wharton, who would talk about freshwater fish; Dr Tim Ealey spoke on echidnas while displaying a lead casting made by pouring molten lead down an ant nest. Dr. L. H. Smith, the then director of the National Parks Service (who was also an expert on lyre birds) initially spoke on the history of national parks. I recall, at one stage, he was using the National Parks Act trying to swat insects annoying him during his talk. He was making the point how all life in a national park was protected, then realising he was publicly trying to kill those insects with the very legislation which protected them!

I became rather fascinated with odd campers who used me as a 'sounding board' of sorts. Their revelations of private thoughts and personal events in their lives never ceased to amaze me. I would often shake my head later and wonder why I, a total stranger, had been told these things. It seemed they desperately needed someone to talk to, not talk with.

Group camping

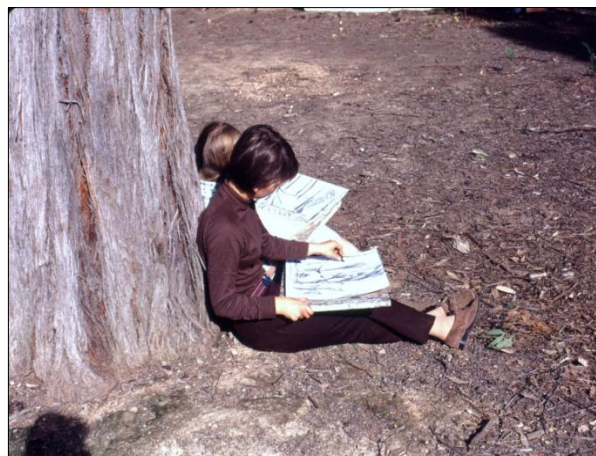
As better facilities were established there was a noticeable increase in the number of groups camping and the Alexandra High School was ideally close to utilise the national park for various activities. One small area was initially set aside for groups above the Devils Cove amenities block, but I didn't insist that all groups use it.



The school had, at one stage, a 'live wire' art teacher, Ron Smith. He was, perhaps, 'different', but, I thought, really an inspirational teacher on the same 'wave length' as the students. His first camp-out in 1969 at Devil's Cove was weekend affair. It was rather hilarious as things were a little rough and ready, but the students loved it. He had brought with him off-cut pieces of soft Mt Gambier stone for carving (it was occasionally used for house construction) and I provided short off-cut pieces of treated pine poles. Budding sculptors set to with chisels and knives. Ron made us an "Easter Island" statue with domed head from one piece of pine.

Ron Smith, left, leading by example

Photos below: Fraser NP 'Open Classroom'



Those with an artistic flair committed their impressions onto paper and, at camp's end, there were 'hangings' of the sketches and paintings on a 'wall' of hessian. The many different sculptures were also displayed within their camp area in a demonstration of their talents.

At camp's end, Ron revealed he had no idea how much food to get for the weekend so he ordered a great quantity of sausages ending up with a surplus of almost 20 pounds of them which all adults proceeded to cook up and eat or take home. It was revealed the students had dined on sausages three times a day.

Ron's camp-out was the forerunner of a more formalised annual week-long camp for Year 3 students which would take place at either the Devils Cove or Candlebark camping areas. The form was split into two so the whole event ran over two weeks. It was better supervised with male and female staff who were kept on their toes and probably didn't get much sleep always having to be wary for unscheduled fraternisation and mischief. Part of my input was to provide stumps and logs for camp fires and, for me, it was a good way to rid the area especially below full supply level of otherwise submerged timber. I conducted each of the classes around the nature trail as part of the botany instruction, or (with teaching staff) to Blowhard as part of a history excursion (and to help wear them out to sleep under canvas of a night!).



The frequent foggy mornings would be idyllic for hikes to Blowhard. One group arrived at the top in sunshine and sat quietly watching the fog peel away to reveal the lovely scenery below.

(Photo: View from Blowhard looking southerly down the Delatite Arm towards Eildon)

One of my more poignant memories was of the group who had

hiked with me up Keg Spur and around the ridge to the top of Blowhard – with pen and paper – and were asked to commit their thoughts to paper. There were the usual written descriptions of scenery, or of the peace and quietness, but then there was the teacher who wrote of the reflections and tranquil scenery below, followed by her private thoughts of her love killed in far away Vietnam.

Ron Smith went on to create a '*Fraser Award*' which, in material form, was a small (about 50mm) copper triangle lightly peened from the rear and with a letter 'F' embossed in the centre. A leather thong enabled it to be worn around the neck. The empathy Ron had with students made this a desirable and highly coveted award. To win one was to virtually get 'bragging rights' because students had to get the requisite number of signatures from teachers who witnessed their various individual achievements. Those teachers must have been worn out at camp's end, but it was all good fun and maintained morale within the camp. This award certainly helped keep students occupied in their spare time. Included in the assessment were climbing a vertical rope, and crossing along a horizontal rope between two trees. They had to hit the same spot twice in succession with an axe, light a fire with one match, demonstrate proficiency in a canoe, and so on. Female students tended not to be high achievers in the use of an axe, but many practised hard.

At other times supervised canoeing, water safety and swimming were very much on the activity sheet. Each Thursday night there was a major bonfire with parents invited to visit. The group would carry out various skits or group singing all to the accompaniment of Ron's guitar and other instruments when available. There were the inevitable potatoes baked in alfoil, and marshmallows heated on the end of a stick. I was honoured to receive an annual gift of a book given to me from the school as appreciation of my extensive involvement in the success of the excursions; the books maintain fond memories of those camps for me.

On reflection, some 35 years later, I recall my good fortune in one incident which perhaps highlighted the relationship between the school and myself. There was occasionally fraternisation between female and male students and other unwelcome young men who would arrive by vehicle after dark. I had no legal rights to order the 'outsiders' to leave, or warn them off! On one such occasion there had been an 'incident' and the camp leader, supported by other staff, decided one lass could not stay at the camp. There were not sufficient teachers to handle the removal of the lass and I

'volunteered' to return her home. We seemed to drive around many back roads for almost an hour before arriving at the girl's home and trying to explain to distressed parents the need for 'good order' at the camp. I occasionally think about this incident realising how fortunate I was in not receiving any accusations of improper conduct myself. Times have certainly changed!

Another Alexandra High School teacher I recall with great respect and admiration was Leon Costermans. Leon was instrumental in setting up and running training sessions for a new Civil Defence group, the early forerunner of the State Emergency Service. (I still have my 'CD' badge somewhere!) Leon had published a field guide 'Trees of Victoria' which I often used to demonstrate the principle of tree identification around the nature trail. Leon went on to publish what, to me, was the best and most useful plant identification guide entitled 'Native Trees and Shrubs of South-Eastern Australia'. At one stage I invited the Civil Defence group out to practice mine shaft rescue from the shafts in the park.

Another memorable group of students came from a Jewish school in Melbourne. All proceeded normally until I fielded telephone calls from parents who had not heard from their children. I had to inform them the supervisors had hired a bus and taken the group off to Canberra for a political demonstration, all without consulting or advising parents! The group arrived back in due course and proceeded with their camp as though nothing out of the ordinary had taken place.

Vermin and Weed Control

In 1962 it appeared that no control work had been done on rabbits for several years, probably not since land sales were concluded prior to the area being declared a national park. The result was quite a serious problem in more ways than one. Obviously neighbours were far from impressed with the situation (although when I was to wander a little outside the park in some areas there was not a lot of difference in rabbit densities).

The spread of rabbits in the Delatite valley actually pre-dated Thomas Austin's official 'first release' in 1856 at Barwon Park, near Geelong. An old newspaper report I saw stated that, in 1848, rabbits had escaped from the Wappan Station and were proving hard to dislodge from the numerous dead and hollow logs. Both the Wappan and Maintongoon stations to the immediate north of the park initially concentrated on clearing their lower river-flat lands along the Delatite River thus facilitating the spread of rabbits along the valleys. While rabbits had been a staple source of food for selectors they had quickly become an enormous problem to the Merlo family by the 1880's in the valley later to become Collier Bay. That family spent considerable time in rabbit proofing wooden stockades around their cultivation areas.

Rabbits in Fraser National Park were highly visible to visitors in the 1960's many of whom would comment on the numbers. The first 'proof' of the park being an object of scorn and ridicule in the district were the so evident rabbits. Fraser NP was not alone in being held in contempt by adjacent and other land owners who saw any crown land as being the source of all their vermin and weed problems.

The National Parks Authority (NPA) maintained a very close scrutiny of any proposed use of poison. Their approval to use 1080 poison needed to be obtained in advance and a one-off aerial poisoning was hotly debated within the committee before their majority recommendation to proceed was sent to the N.P.A. While committeeman Lin Cumming could reluctantly accept the need for 1080 poison he was strongly opposed to the indiscriminate nature and effect on water supplies when applied from an aeroplane. However the committee felt they really had no feasible alternative courses of

action available to them if it was to get on top of the problem.

The then Lands Department became involved via its Vermin and Noxious Weeds Division based in Alexandra. An older method of poisoning using thistle roots and strychnine was deemed too labour intensive and unrealistic in view of the size and topography of the park, and the number of rabbits. The use of a 'tar baby' technique using 1080 that I had seen in Kinchega NP (NSW) was denied, even as a local trial. Permission to hand broadcast poisoned bait across specific areas not accessible to wheeled vehicles was also not readily forthcoming for many years. Eventually it was allowed in inaccessible areas but subject to tight controls.

Despite Lin Cumming's objection and dissenting vote it was decided to aerial poison the steeper western areas of the park using diced carrot dyed with malachite green (to make the bait less attractive to birds) and impregnated with sodium mono-fluoroacetate, or 1080. The question of boundaries for this poisoning found myself sitting on the edge of the pilot's seat in the cockpit of a single seater plane with the pilot. Approval had been obtained for the use of a rough strip near the fire tower just south of Haines Saddle. This was an interesting exercise for me as the plane accelerated down the slope to the end of the strip then literally launched itself off into 'space'. Adding to the drama, for me, was the fact that I was sitting on the edge of the seat jammed against the cockpit window which tended to move in and out as the pilot manoeuvred the aircraft. The window was restrained with a piece of baling twine.

Lin Cumming was to walk with me in areas of the park - sometimes with his daughter Sandra - after various poisoning campaigns to evaluate the results for himself. I recall his distress when we did come across a dead wallaby, or a dead brush-tailed possum. My crude autopsy quickly revealed the stomachs of these animals to be a half to two thirds full of carrot, so it could be conclusively stated the animals had been poisoned. Examination of the stomach contents of the odd dead grey kangaroo invariably showed no trace of carrot but, on one occasion, I was to find a few small pieces of finely chewed carrot. Lin's opposition towards poisoning firmed up and he was very pleased when the aerial poisoning was discontinued. However, rabbit control was a necessity and there were no other practical options at the time.

The Lands Department commenced an annual poisoning using a trail method of making a shallow furrow in the ground surface behind a tractor. Two 'free feeds' were placed into the furrow two or three days apart. A third run saw diced and dyed poisoned carrot placed into the trail. After two nights the trail was then back filled to cover any remaining carrot and so minimise any risk to other wildlife. This method was used in various areas of the park where it was possible to use a tractor. While I had some involvement in this poisoning I was to attack warrens on some of the steeper country, or other non-accessible areas using fumigation techniques. Both the Lands Dept. and myself would also use tractors to rip warrens on gentler slopes.

Flaked cyanide was often used to fumigate burrows when the soil was damp but, at times, I would be using chloropicrin. This liquid came in corked bottles with a screw top lid placed inside a sealed tin packed with sawdust to protect against accidental breakage, and leakage should the bottle break. It was an awful liquid to use particularly on a hot day when the air was still. To find out this was one of the gases used by the Germans during World War 1 did little to endear me to its use especially when an occasional odour while laying down with my arm inserted into the burrow would quickly bring tears to my eyes, or even cause me to move away and gasp for air.

Lin Cumming and I held many personal discussions about rabbit control involving poison. At times, during later years, I had several unemployment program staff on the payroll. Together with seven or eight of these men I would form a 'line abreast' search around areas that had been poisoned. Lin

gradually seemed much appeased by the various searches conducted invariably with the result of no observations of native animal deaths, or perhaps an occasional possum or wallaby or even more rarely, a kangaroo. Yet there was no denying the steady build up of kangaroo numbers particularly around the Devils Cove area, an area subject to much poisoning.

There had never been any evaluation of just what other native animals might occur within the park but the committee felt the continued presence of any such animals would be jeopardized by high rabbit numbers. Lin went on later to strongly oppose the live capture of rabbits for inoculation with myxoma virus believing it was a despicable way to kill. I found catching rabbits while running after them with a net using the light from a spotlight would often result in many bruises.

The committee and myself were concerned at many large rabbit warrens around the upper and northern slopes of Blowhard. Despite several attempts at fumigation over many years, trail poisoning along the ridge tops and even hand broadcasting poisoned carrots nearby, the warrens kept being re-opened. A contractor was brought in and I assisted him by punching a crowbar down through the gravel. Depending on the size of the warren this action would be repeated a number of times. A half stick of gelignite was lowered into each hole and set off to prepare small underground chambers. Next to be inserted into the crowbar holes was a full stick of gelignite followed by ammonium nitrate impregnated with diesel fuel. It was just too simple. To see those warrens literally disappear after years of effort and frustration, teary eyes and coughing from those horrible fumigants, was a great relief.

While many of the methods used for rabbit control were 'traditional' I recall the use of petrol on one occasion arising out of sheer frustration. Tunnelling was a form of erosion caused by overgrazing and burrowing which allowed water into the sub surface areas of gullies. Water would often disappear below ground level only to reappear much further down the slope. Nearby rabbit feeding areas were a prime target for trail poisoning but always the tunnels were used by rabbits to build up again. On one occasion when there was a small amount of surface water disappearing underground I trickled petrol down into the subterranean area and allowed the fumes to permeate the side burrows. Some burning rag on the end of a shovel was then applied resulting in a multitude of explosions.

While the use of petrol was really quite ineffectual on any sort of longer term basis the involvement of committeeman 'Mac' Wood saw Mr. Col Paul and (later) Mr. Denis Martin from the Soil Conservation Authority visiting the park to offer advice. Many gullies were ripped and diversion banks placed above the treated area to collect and divert water off to the side. Raw gullies would be covered with brush then treated with a mixture of grass seed and fertiliser. However, we did not accept their recommended use of phalaris and willows for regeneration.

A little earlier Cr. Collier had complained, in Committee, that the rabbits were marching out of the park, down the road, and infesting the district! He also laboured the point (correctly) that wombats were declared vermin and these animals living within the park were going through his netted boundary fence allowing rabbits to infest his adjoining land. I had previously installed swinging trapdoor type wombat gates on a similar netting fence at the north-west of the park and at home but he would not have them; he did not want the wombats eating his grass. The matter was hotly debated but, in the end, the Committee reluctantly gave me the instruction to fumigate wombat burrows within 50 yards of his short boundary with the park.

In the matter of rabbit control I record my strongest regard towards Mr. John Pollard, the then incumbent Lands Department Inspector. John and I went on to form a strong working relationship. We both recognised that, while we could work in many areas accessible to wheeled vehicles there was a lot of the park with which he was not familiar.

I had prepared a hand drawn map of the park based on aerial photography and had used this to record many of the names gleaned from early settlers. We divided this map into about 15 different areas and set out with the aim of walking a similar route through each of these areas twice a year to obtain a more accurate assessment of rabbit numbers, and where and how to tackle any problem 'hot spots'. We were to find many remote troublesome areas on the steep wattle and bracken covered slopes of the western section of Blowhard Ridge.

I had also caused culvert posts along the roads to be numbered and would sometimes point out to staff that I had seen a rabbit above, for example, 'culvert number 12'. This 'defined' area would be searched looking for any warrens or hollow logs which then might be split open, or burnt.

In later years Lin Cumming raised the issue of my being issued with a permit to shoot within the park and the committee debated this at length before agreeing to put a supportive recommendation to the National Parks Service. Both the committee and NPS were often in the position of having to consider what to do with many individual cases of illegal shooting in the park but a permit was eventually granted to me. Spotlight shooting during winter meant I was often to come off the ridge tops with aching joints due to the cold, but, John and I started to notice many of those difficult-to-access warrens below the ridge tops where I was repeatedly shooting rabbits were falling into disuse.

One exciting observation during spotlighting was, for me, the sighting of a brush-tailed phascogale, or tuan, along the Blowhard ridge. I was to keep a photo book with a picture of this amazing animal in the office as most visitors had never heard of such an animal and couldn't quite comprehend my explanation of it looking like a 'rat with a bottle brush for a tail'.

Within a few years the rabbit numbers in the park had dropped significantly. During our hikes together John was to tell me how farmers for 20 miles or more around the park used to point the finger at the 'government land' claiming all the rabbits on their properties had come from the national park. John now found himself in the unique position of being able to rebut these inane claims based on his first hand detailed knowledge of the whole of the park. The lack of rabbits was also self evident to visitors and that form of criticism slowly died away. Any visitors I was talking to who might claim the park was infested with rabbits were often 'silenced' by my challenging them to show me where and when they had seen the rabbits! The decline in rabbit numbers allowed our hikes to be reduced to one per year through each 'block'.

An interesting side effect of the eradication campaign was the number of particularly English visitors who mentioned to me they had noticed a dead rabbit or two. My explanations as to the possible cause was met with a degree of protest for invariably these people believed everything should be protected in a national park.



Old beliefs died hard in the district farming community. With the rapid decrease in rabbit numbers there was a great surge in grass and other vegetative regrowth. The kangaroos bred well; in fact I believe many came in from outside the park. Kangaroo viewing in the evenings became a popular reason for visiting the park especially with the introduction of daylight saving. Obviously, the kangaroos had not been impacted greatly by previous poisoning campaigns.

However, many of the land owners formerly claiming all rabbits came out of the national park merely changed their protests. They now stated their belief thousands of kangaroos were exiting the national park and infesting the district - despite many scores of them still readily seen around the head of Collier Bay as shown above in 1972. (I can state, with confidence, land owners adjoining national parks in Queensland are just the same)!

At the time of my arrival in 1962 very few kangaroos were to be seen in the park and they were very 'wild'. By 1975 many deaths were noted during successive winters. There had not been any poisoning so samples were taken away for scientific analysis. During the colder weather dozens of kangaroos were now shown to be dying from a lack of protein, in effect, malnutrition. I went on to record both sex and measurement of the pez (heel to base of toe of the rear foot) to get an idea of mortality rates.

While the battle to control rabbits had passed a critical turning point the same could not be said for weed control. There were always masses of cape weed indicating old sheep camps on knolls and ridges. There was a heavy infestation of St. John's Wort across the lake within the Enterprise peninsula and it wasn't long before I was reporting on its alarming spread within the park. The biological control insects such as the chrysomela beetle and gall fly followed the weed's incursion and while some of the committee were content to let nature take its course it became obvious the insects were far from efficient in slowing the weed's spread.

Government unemployment schemes were utilised to purchase Merino misters and the herbicide Tordon and overalls. A team of men would spray the weed around the hill slopes. I am somewhat embarrassed now to reflect on the lack of safety equipment provided at the time and recall the occasion when I was criticised by a committeeman for allowing park money to be re-inserted into showers so these men could have a shower at day's end! Despite the sweat being lost across the upper slopes it was rare indeed for visitors to comment on the prominent and so evident yellow flower of St. John's Wort.

I was to find some skeleton weed in the Blowhard area but was aware that a wind borne fungus has been reported attacking this plant across New South Wales. Despite the distance it was amazing to see this weed succumb to the fungus. Another weed of concern discovered on the slopes to the south of Lakeside was Patterson's Curse, or Salvation Jane. I was to control this by hand pulling.

Stock Grazing

Sheep were to be seen grazing on the hills on my first day at Fraser National Park. They would originate mainly, but not entirely, from neighbouring properties to the north and south where fences were not in good condition. Something of a stalemate developed with some neighbours' sheep being seen in the park at all periods throughout the year, invariably during dry periods. As I got to know various brands I would contact owners who would 'get around' to removing them from the park. Advice filtered on to me that the matter of trespassing stock was a bit of a joke; some neighbours were 'known' to have purchased extra stock to put into the park.

A neighbour to the north, Mr. L. Doyle, claimed he was unable to satisfactorily repair his section of the boundary fence and continually sought financial assistance initially from the committee, then the National Parks Service, over a period of some years. The lack of financial assistance from the committee was used to promote his tardiness in removing stock. The committee could not accede to the request as the government had a firm policy of 'no assistance' to neighbours of crown land.

Mr. Doyle went on to personally lobby the elected government member claiming he previously had a private neighbour with whom he could share costs but now the government had imposed a national park onto the area he was severely disadvantaged. His persistence won out and the government finally relented in this one-off 'special case'. The new fence was quite an advantage to the park in minimizing sheep trespass from this direction.

My requests for assistance from the council officer responsible for collecting and moving trespassing stock to the pound fell on deaf ears. I was personally quite fit and in 1970 was training for a return visit to the Southern Alps in New Zealand. This would often see me carrying a pack weighted with bricks around the slopes within the park and I came to believe I could muster the sheep off the hill slopes into yards.

Some members of the committee raised their eyebrows but approved my unusual request and saw that I had steel pickets and netting to erect temporary fencing. Together with my assistant (Fred Radford) on the road below I would harry the sheep from above and press them backwards and forwards, ever lower until we could move them right around to the temporary yard near my house.

The pound keeper would collect the sheep from these temporary yards and transport the flock to the pound in Alexandra. This action was repeated as the occasion demanded when the owners were 'too busy' to remove them from the park. To a man they were sceptical I could bring sheep off the hills unaided by dogs. I believe a degree of begrudging respect developed as owners had to accept a new situation where they had a choice of 'move them, or pay the pound release fees'.



An early view of 'our' house showing the wing fence and part of the 'stockyards' at lower right

There was one neighbour – many people told me the family didn't enjoy a 'good reputation' in the area - with whom trouble might be expected. Some years before I arrived in the district it was alleged they had entered the Alexandra pound in the early hours of morning. Their previously impounded sheep were lifted over the pound fence and vanished into the darkness leaving a locked and intact gate behind. Their sheep were

always removed from the park without delay upon request. Trespassing sheep were never a problem for me when 1080 poisoning was being carried out in the park.

While I had earned some 'runs on the board' with impounding sheep, cattle were another matter. At one stage there was a small herd of yearling cattle from the Bonnie Doon district noticed in the Whitehorse (or Sawpit) Gully area to the north of the park and it seemed probable they were being pushed southerly as they soon appeared in the Aird Inlet area, well inside the park. When contacted the owners seemed to be not in a hurry to remove them at all.

I had no experience with cattle (nor sheep, either) and I made a fundamental mistake of wiring sapling poles to the outside of trees above the Devil Cove amenities block to form a temporary yard. Fred Radford drove the Land Rover while I pressed the cattle backwards and forwards up and over the ridge from Aird Inlet, down to Devils Cove and into the 'yards'. The cattle merely put their heads down under the rails and pushed their way out. Quick improvisations were made with the rails placed on the inside of the trees and the cattle were soon back inside. All it took was one

further telephone call to the owners to come and get them or they would have to go to the pound in Alexandra. The owners turned up with a truck rather quickly and took them away.

At one stage the Committee were formally requested to allow drought affected sheep from outside the district to graze in the park on agistment. The committee recognised at the time of gazettal there were serious land erosion problems and weed infestations resulting from past land use practices. They were pleased that a semblance of stock control had now been achieved quite independent of private stock yards outside the park, or use of dogs. Worried about the precedent that could be created, and the intrusion of further weed species from outside the district, they refused to sanction the request. Interestingly, the matter died quickly.

The sudden appearance of Patterson's Curse was attributed to trespassing sheep. Lin Cumming knew of the value of Paterson's Curse to other apiarists as the honey fodder plant Salvation Jane, as it was known in South Australia, and would occasionally suggest it would be 'good' to see the blue flowers competing with the yellow flowers of St. John's Wort.

Now that neighbours realised what could happen to trespassing stock, fences were kept in better repair. I was realistic in knowing that trees and branches did fall over fences and stock could wander into the park without aid. However, I considered the matter of trespassing stock was no longer an issue when I telephoned a neighbour to advise him of his stock in the park and was met with the apologetic response (which was music to my ears): 'I'm sorry, I just can't get there until tomorrow. Would that be soon enough?'

Not long afterwards I took three months long service leave in north Queensland. On my return I noticed, near Haines Saddle, a lot of dead sheep below the road very close to the park boundary, and above the steep road cutting near the first lookout. The brand indicated they were owned by the neighbour who was apologetic for not being able to remove sheep instantly on my earlier request. I was told by the acting ranger in charge they had been shot. Querying if the owner had been contacted I was met with 'he knows sheep are not allowed in the park and the sheep had no business being in the park', and, basically, 'you are too old and your management style is old fashioned'. I noted a purchase of ammunition from government unemployment funds was used for the shooting.

Keeping the Peace!

A problem associated with taking control of trespassing stock and rampaging rabbits was to manifest itself with a huge increase in grass growth. Not even the increasing kangaroo population could keep this down entirely and, at times, the park was tinder dry. Busy periods would invariably see me taking to the water, generally of an evening, to check on visitor activities in other inlets of the park, particularly camp fires and shooting. Patrolling and law enforcement activities were mainly an after hours and 'lone' activity particularly during weekends and holiday periods.

It is interesting to consider the operation of the park boat and its maintenance costs were aimed almost wholly at protection of the foreshore and indirectly the park beyond. This green six metre half cabin park boat was moored at a pontoon directly below the house. At times the Fisheries and Wildlife boat would be moored there in addition to the Forestry boat complete with its pump and hoses.

In outer areas of the park visitors off house boats often would pile up logs on the foreshore and light a fire to provide 'atmosphere'. Invariably, these fires would be difficult to extinguish and would be left smouldering. Despite talking to many boat operators fires lit and left in the grass around the

foreshore were a great source of concern. I consider myself fortunate never to have a wildfire occur in the park. In time I was to extend my 'after hours' patrols of the foreshore to the Wappan Block sometimes returning quite late after dark.

I recall one incident where a 'repeat offender' from a houseboat was subsequently charged by the EWR committee. I had all the measurements to prove my case but the defendant brought along to court some 20 friends. After giving my evidence of the accused person's non compliance and very real risk of the fire spreading the defendant's solicitor stated there had been a local shower of rain which meant, in the eyes of the legislation of the period, there was 'no risk of spread of fire' and therefore the defendant did not need to provide a clearance around his fire or dig the required pit. Defence counsel further stated there were some 20 witnesses present also prepared to give corroborating evidence. It was little comfort to me when the magistrate said he had little option but to accept the weight of 'evidence'. He handed down a 'not guilty' verdict, but would not award costs against the committee, despite a request for same.

I tended to crack down on drunken rowdy behaviour with crude language in camping areas and, over the years, several such incidents would have their sequel in the Alexandra court. I could hear one such rowdy party from home late one evening coinciding with a knock on our door requesting assistance from another camper with young children. I dressed and eventually quietened the party somewhat. There was a sense of great satisfaction from both myself and neighbouring campers when I arrived at the noisy camp just after dawn cleanly shaven and bright eyed complete with uniform and tie and woke the hung-over inhabitants, ordering them to pack up and leave immediately. My 'problem' was that it was then much too late to go back to bed myself!

Shooting was not infrequent in different parts of the park. This was mainly rabbit shooting but I was a little sceptical when one such offender with a .303 rifle claimed he was after rabbits. There would be many occasions when I would see a spotlight operating along the Skyline Road. Depending on precisely where the light was operating I would drive up the winding road to Haines Saddle then along Skyline Road with perhaps just parking lights. I recall being close behind one car as it approached the second large national park sign. I was close enough to hear the driver urgently summoning his shooter to get in the car as 'we are in a national park'. I was always sceptical that it was possible for anyone to go past those 12" wide sign boards stating 'Fraser National Park' without seeing them but this incident made me reconsider my attitude.

The opening of duck season and the following weekend would always see me out on the waters of Collier Bay before dawn often intercepting and warning shooters away from the 'tame' native ducks and campers around the head of the bays. I was to occasionally observe some of these shooters pursuing ducks in high-speed boats.

While I tended to be somewhat wary about accepting favours from visitors I did take the opportunity to learn to water ski. During one such ski trip I noticed a speed boat tied to the bank near Point Mibus and a 'shooter' operating within the park. On return to Collier Bay I obtained my notebook, biro and official 'authority'. Returning to the scene, I just 'happened' to fall into the water where I could observe the shooting. From this incident I was known – at one stage - as 'the ski-ing ranger'!

My reporting of these many incidents to the committee invariably added to my workload with a typewritten account of what I had seen, and what was said by the offender and myself. There was also a pro-forma sheet to be filled in to accompany each report. The committee paid particular attention to two items on these sheets, namely, 'attitude of offender' and my 'recommendation'. The national park committee would forward these reports on to the head office with their

recommendation to either prosecute, or for a warning letter to be issued. The EWR committee merely forwarded the reports to their prosecution officer in Alexandra for action when they felt it was necessary. Some members of the committee were a bit discomfited to be in the room where firearms would be stacked at times 'behind the door'.

On another occasion I was at the Lakeside area when I heard two loud 'gun shots' from the Devils Cove area. It appeared the offenders had just disappeared - until I eventually noticed our barbeque splattered with baked beans and spaghetti. An unhappy camper nearby sheepishly admitted he didn't know to puncture cans before heating the contents which, on this occasion, had exploded.

Gil Foster was the incumbent Fisheries and Wildlife Inspector for the district. On one occasion I accompanied him around the foreshore while he checked fishing licences. Visiting a camp of three visitors with whom I had become quite friendly I introduced Gil to the party one of whom became quite excited because she had been buying a licence for many years but never been asked to produce it. The more she wanted Gil to ask for her licence the more he declined. I had noticed the others had 'gone quiet' and later found out the lady didn't have a current licence. It had expired! (This particular visitor used to make the most delightful shortbread biscuits, and I obtained the recipe. That recipe is now well known among our friends as Yvonne has added chopped macadamia nuts and ginger).

My casual knowledge of where certain houseboats were moored was used to advantage when the Alexandra police advised of a visitor missing overboard from a houseboat well outside my normal operational area near the junction of the Delatite and Boonie Doon reaches of the lake. I recalled where I had seen the vessel and was able to take police directly to the now deserted cove and to actually sight a body under the water. As the only one with any degree of fitness I was able to enter the water and secure the body and see it recovered into the boat. A radio message back to Yvonne enabled local undertakers to be on hand at our pontoon below the house when we returned.

This wasn't the only accidental drowning with which I was involved. Another incident took place where a lad had disappeared and eventually been recovered from beneath the water in the deep bay on the western side of Lakeside. I co-opted one of my casual workers who was relaxing nearby with his speed boat and transported the lifeless body to the boat harbour where we were abused over the loud hailer for speeding. I found my request to give early warning for assistance had not been received in advance and a further delay in obtaining an ambulance occurred. My attempts at resuscitation at Lakeside and during the boat trip had really been too late, and ineffective. My state of mind with this awful incident was not improved when the committee received a request for some costs associated with fuel and damage to the speed boat and some members argued strongly against payment.

On another occasion I received a request to assist police search the foreshore, and houses in the adjacent Bolte Bay in an effort to apprehend escaped prisoners. One of the police (not from Alexandra) came equipped with a doubled over length of lead pipe and kept slapping it against his leg repeatedly saying 'I hope I can find them'.

On another occasion I was to receive a telephone call for urgent assistance in relation to a family death. Fortunately, the person was able to describe rather accurately a certain houseboat which I had noticed tucked away in a narrow inlet in the Wappan Block area and I was able to convey the required information. It is not easy to look someone in the eye and tell them a loved one had died! Several weeks later I received a knock at the door of my office and had a bottle of scotch whiskey thrust into my hands in thanks for that assistance. Despite my protestations that a personal sense of well-being was derived from being able to assist others the visitor just walked away saying 'thank

you'. I still have that full bottle; it is stored in my 'getting around to it' area.

Following my attendance at a ranger training school in Sydney in 1967 the committee approved my request for a pump and motor together with a short intake to hang over the side of the boat and some lengths of canvas hose. This became a more-or-less permanent fixture in the boat during dry periods. The only time I was to use this equipment was to extinguish a fire burning late one afternoon within the pines at Stillman's Point east of Collier Bay, without other assistance.

On another occasion there was a fire in the Acheron area. It was very quiet in the park and I attended this fire with Fred Radford in our Land Rover and 100 gallon fire tanker trailer complete with its own pump. I was rather embarrassed at the next committee meeting when I later received a rebuke from John Channon, for, despite my argument of needing actual fire experience with our equipment, he believed (correctly) he was entitled to expect me to be available within the national park during periods of high fire risk. The whole incident was a valuable experience for me - especially the deserved rebuke - and in the use of the equipment at an actual wildfire and seeing that fire spotting across into the Rubicon.

It is interesting to reflect there was really little advice or training from Forestry aimed at fire prevention within either Fraser, The Lakes or Wilsons Promontory national parks where I worked. At a fire in the latter park Forestry sent park staff including myself into a non effective area which became quite dangerous with three of us almost cut off by a back burn.

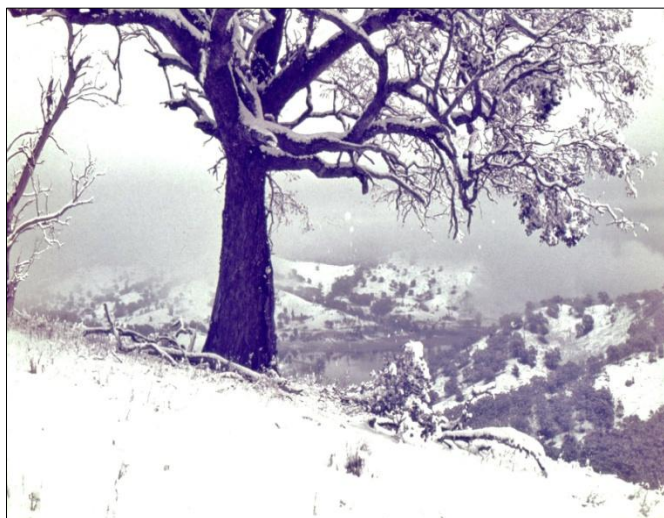
In later years Forester and committeeman Keith Jerome sought approval for me to be co-opted annually with him in a competition relating to fire preparedness for the many Country Fire Authority units in the district. There was a prize of a pump and motor on offer. We drew up a schedule and would inspect the shed and equipment held by various units allocating points for such things as clearances around the building, contact lists of members and other units displayed, maintenance schedules, and so on. No doubt there have been improvements since I left!

Living in a national park

The introduction of daylight saving created more work for me. Increased visitation led to an extended demand for services such as toilet cleaning and rubbish collection. Personal contact with visitors meant I worked a longer day. Living right in the public eye meant many out of hours interruptions we would sooner have done without. Still, it wasn't as bad as Tidal River where the ranger staff would occasionally take a motel room in Foster to get an uninterrupted nights sleep during busy periods. Even working in our vegetable garden at the rear of the house could attract enquiries from visitors who might see me.

We would make seasonal visits to Shepparton to purchase cases of apricots, peaches and pears for bottling and this kept Yvonne and I busy with preparation prior to sterilisation in our Fowler's Vacola unit. In season we would also bring home boxes of apples from Bacchus Marsh and repeat the process. There would be scores of mixed bottled fruits in our pantry. In this way we kept our food bills down, and lived healthily. Fresh rabbit was often on the menu also.

There was a semi combustion stove in the kitchen for cooking and an open fire in the lounge to help keep the house warm in winter. These fires helped change the house into a family home. A gas stove allowed quicker heat for alternative cooking. Keeping up the supply of good dry firewood kept me



busy. The disadvantage of this type of stove was the small opening into the firebox limiting the size of wood that would fit into the combustion chamber.

The better firewood was either red box or yellow box. Of a night we would use 6 briquettes stacked in pairs with each layer at 90 degrees to the last pair. With calm still nights there would be coals in the morning onto which we placed light wood to restart the fire. During summer we would light a fire using good dry kindling type wood to provide a brief but intense heat to boost hot water without warming the house unduly. In time

the Committee purchased a small in-line electric booster unit to allow us to have hot water without lighting the fire during summer at all.

The winters tended to be cool and wet with occasional snowfalls, but it was the seemingly endless, sometimes heavy and almost day-long fogs which gave a drabness to the landscape. On occasions the fog would start to lift late in the afternoon only to settle down again. The mists swirling around and through the trees would provide an ever changing and sometimes surreal and eerie atmosphere. Offsetting the gloomy weather would be the lovely views revealed as the fog dissipated.

A gas copper was initially fitted into the laundry for clothes washing but I removed this unit to allow us to install our small Hoover washing machine complete with hand wringer. One evening a delightful owl nightjar tumbled down the flue pipe. It must have been seeking a nesting hollow. The gas copper was loaned to the Alexandra High School annually until I finally suggested they keep it on a 'permanent loan' basis for their camp-outs.

Working in the park initially called for me to be on duty every weekend and for this there were no penalty rates; that came many years later. While this might seem to be an imposition today we didn't mind particularly when the children were young for on our days off the shops and banks were open, and there was less traffic on the roads. The wages were never substantial but the life style was more varied and superior to working at my old trade in a factory.

My single sighting of the brush-tailed phascogale and an account of a tiger cat saw an interest develop in utilising a microscope to determine what other nocturnal animals might be about by analysing the hairs often found within animal scats. I knew Brian Coman who had co-authored a book 'The Identification of Mammalian Hair', and he encouraged me to further my interests. Even though I had worked for the National Parks Service for over 10 years, and had a supportive deputy director of the Fisheries and Wildlife Department on the committee, the F&W Dept. were to refuse me a permit to officially hold small samples of road kill native animal fur as a comparative reference. It was a classical case of 'perhaps it is better not to seek permission' for what I was doing. I had also started a collection of insect visitors to our house lights. The monthly reports I read to the committee invariably included sightings of the steadily increasing bird list, and of notable plants such as the terrestrial orchids for which we had developed an affinity whilst at Wilsons Promontory.

In addition to learning to touch type to 40 words per minute and developing a limited proficiency in shorthand I took on correspondence studies which continued for three years. With ongoing interruptions from campers and other demands on my time I didn't extend these studies. The lack of a university education somewhat inhibited my application and subsequent interview for a Churchill Fellowship. At that time none of the rangers employed across Victoria possessed a degree.

My study hours tended to start at about 5am. Australian history was one of the subjects and, with a more mature interest, I tended to become fascinated with the forbears and their struggles developing a more mature interest in history. I was to talk to many persons much older than myself about their recollections of what was now the Fraser National Park and environs. Bob Stone was one such person. The reason for the name of Perfect Cure Creek was ascribed to him saying to drink its water was the perfect cure after spending a hot day up on the slopes. Perhaps a more logical explanation may be found within the history of the Merlo family. Bob had trapped and bludgeoned to death a tiger cat (or spotted tail quoll) on his land in what is now Devils Cove. His somewhat embellished story of the ferocity of this animal may have given rise to the local name of Devil Cove.

A more likely (and written) account is that the early white explorers along the Delatite River heard an aboriginal corroboree and, being alarmed, gave the river the name of 'The Devil's River'. The original track easterly of Haines Saddle down into the valley was called the Devil's River Road. I was told the rainbow bird, or rainbow bee eater, used to migrate seasonally into the valley and nest in the sandy banks of the Delatite River.

Keg Spur was another local name on the short spur and fire trail rising from Devils Cove to the Blowhard ridge. It was said that Merlo was returning down the ridge and somehow his keg of wine got away, rolled on down the slope and smashed. It was disappointing that the name 'Merlo' was not shown on any early map. Perhaps 'Italian Bay' (immediately adjacent and on the north of Cook Point and Italian Gully, a little further north) were an oblique reference to him, but there were many gold seekers of all nationalities about.



1963 view of Devil's Cove

Foreground and lower left: Keg Spur fire trail.

Lower centre: Bob Stone's shed and Perfect Cure Creek showing the old access track across the flats and ridge.

Top right: Mt. Torbreck and Snobs Creek valley.

This photo highlights the bareness of what became, in later years, the Devils Cove camping area

Gradually, over the years, I was to locate and interview some relatives of Bob Brier, an elderly hermit who lived and died along Italian Creek. His footwear consisted of old car tyres held on with wire. The several stockades he had built not far from what became Lake Eildon to exclude rabbits and wombats from his gardens and fruit trees had fallen into disrepair but were still evident when I arrived at the park. Apparently the family had a fondness for gooseberries, and these were still to be found there.

Bob was said to have travelled to the West Australian goldfields pushing a wooden wheelbarrow. Prior to his illness and subsequent death, he used to push such a barrow as seen here (complete with wooden wheel) up and over what is now the Skyline Road camping just short of Alexandra. Leaving camp early he would go into Alexandra, shop, then push his barrow loaded with food on the return trip, again camping along the way. The third day saw him go up and over the (Skyline Road) ridge and descend to his residence area. When he was physically unable to continue this trip the Doyle family (who lived nearby) used to purchase food on his behalf and leave it at the edge of his residence area. Phil Koop, formerly a police officer at Alexandra, was to work for the park years later during one of the unemployment schemes. He had previously been involved at the time of Brier's death and constructed replica wheelbarrows and seats for the park.



The only map of the park available to me at the time was one aerial photo. This was obviously not suitable for the many facets of field work required and, using this photo as a base, I drew another map, painstakingly marking in the symbols for ridges and creeks and other points pertinent to management. Committeeman Lin Cumming pushed to have historical names placed on the map and the committee appointed Forester Keith Jerome and me to do this. It was here that my interest in the history of the area came to the fore as I marked in some of the historical names as I knew them even though, at times, there wasn't complete unanimity among informants.

Perhaps it was a stroke of larrikinism but we named the worst erosion scour in the park located on the western side of Blowhard 'Woods Gulch' after committeeman 'Mac' Wood, (Deputy Director of the Soil Conservation Authority) and tabled the map in committee. The committee didn't notice the impertinence and moved to send the map to the official Place Names Committee for ratification via the National Parks Service. I personally was rather embarrassed when the Secretary brought the map back in due course with official acceptance. No-one had noticed 'Woods Gulch'.



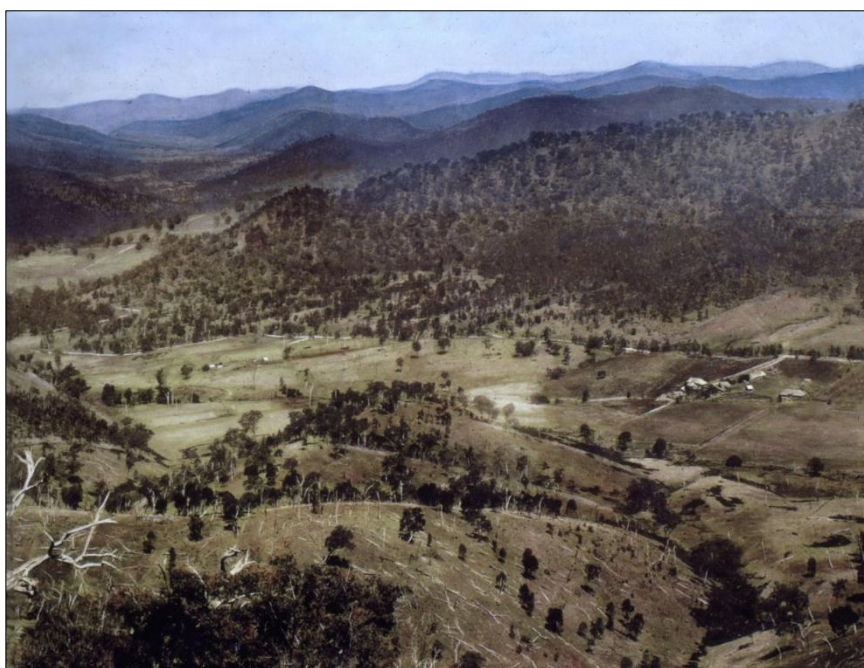
Site of the Maintongoon Station: Woolshed Inlet (rear) with Lightwood Inlet (foreground). The EWR Committee extended the walking track around the foreshore into this inlet. Wapman Block at left beyond the lake.

Both Maintongoon and Station creeks referred to the old Maintongoon Station as did White Horse Gully, also known as Saw Pit Gully or Pit Saw Gully. Woolshed Gully, on the eastern side of the

lake also originated from this station. 'Wapman' came from the old Wapman Station to the north. The Peppins from that area moved to New South Wales and founded the famous merino stud. School Point was adopted by the committee in recognition of an old school for children in the Maintongoon Station area, as was Lightwood Inlet, so named after my finding this wattle (*Acacia implexa*) growing there. The name Wallaby Bay was given by the Committee to the new destination at the

end of the northern road extension. Haines Saddle was said to be named after a Country Roads Board foreman.

There were many shallow gold diggings to be seen within the park and Auriferous Spur was the name for the ridge adjacent to the main access road descending to Collier Bay. The more 'substantial' excavations were to be found in the west of the park with some horizontal shafts, or adits. I was to find a stub of an old candle in one of these adits, and an old soda water bottle with its rounded bottom in a rock wall. At one time I used polythene rope to descend into one old shaft and, slipping, badly burnt my fingers. The Jack of Clubs Spur was said to be connected to the gold mining as was Devasser Gully, or DeVas' Gully, or Devass' Gully. It was never clear at the time whether this name had its origins with gold seeking or the Maintongoon Station or an early settler, or exactly how it was spelt.



Perhaps the most fortuitous meeting for me was to meet with Hazel Merlo, grand-daughter of an original selector in the valley which is now Collier Bay. A most important gift from Hazel was her hand tinted replica of an old photo taken (c. 1900) from the slopes above and looking across the original Merlo house and yards down the valley of the Delatite River towards the current Lake Eildon wall. Hazel told me that, just prior to the flooding of the valley, she had taken cuttings of different grape vines from her grandfather's farm, one of which she offered me. This was planted in my garden at the rear of our house where it did quite well. Merlo, an Italian immigrant, was well known for the wine produced from his vineyards.

I was to use a slide of this replica at many slide shows about the park and its history. In memory of this selector the national park committee caused a 'Merlo Lookout' sign to be erected around the (then) new road on the north side of Collier Bay.

Some early residents told me how koalas used to inhabit the area claiming they were hunted to extermination locally for their skins. I raised the matter with the committee and Jim Wharton, representing the Fisheries and Wildlife Department, sought information as to what amount of edible eucalypts occurred within the park. In 1967 the first batch of 25 koalas arrived in boxes direct from Phillip Island (in a very bad mood) and released in the Devil Cove area. This was a valuable experience in watching the handling of these stressed animals. For some years I maintained a diary

and recorded sightings or other evidence of the koalas and I was able to establish their favoured trees and feeding patterns and where they might be seen.

One of the koalas was sighted on an adjacent property to the north west of the park. I also found some favoured feeding trees in the Aird Inlet catchment. At one stage I was called upon to resolve whether pigs occurred in the park. Explaining the noise koalas made one of the campers expressed relief they wouldn't have to 'lock their tent of a night'!

My reading of Brough-Smythe's 'Aborigines of Victoria' did not provide specific information in relation to existence of aborigines in the area and I was too late arriving on the scene to talk to anyone who could assist in this field. Two items of interest to me remain from Brough-Smythe's work: one was the possible spread of small pox into the district in advance of the arrival of white explorers and settlers, and the medicinal use of a local shrub known as sweet bursaria (*Bursaria spinosa*). Interestingly, I did not have any contact from anyone representing aborigines during my 15 years in the district.

I was to spend many evenings going through old local newspapers searching for information about gold activity in the park area. Reports were noticed about the modest successes in the upper UT Creek (short for 'ultima Thule'. In medieval geographies this denoted any distant place located beyond the "borders of the known world". In the local context it meant the 'furthest country' from Alexandra, or the Red Gate, as the township area was formerly known). A sharp bend on the UT Creek Road where it touches the park was known as the Devils Elbow.



Looking across Stone Bay towards Woolshed Gully; Wappan Block on left with Whitehorse/Saw Pit Gully at lower left. School Point at right. Enterprise Peninsula at rear

In the latter part of my stay at Fraser I became interested in increasing the size of the park. This initially meant my spending more and more time walking about and reporting on the vegetation in an area of crown land to the north of the park known as the Wappan Block. As my interest expanded I was to take two retired scientists into different parts of the Enterprise Peninsula area to start evaluating some of its resources. At other times I would explore this peninsula walking alone within the bushland, or driving the various tracks.

Moving On

Big changes within the National Park Service were taking place during the 1970's. A new director had been appointed replacing Dr. L.H. Smith. The Fraser National Park Committee of Management which had operated since 1958 was abolished in 1975. Mr. FitzRoy was invited to serve as chairman of a new state-wide group advising the minister.

Attempts by government to open up marginal country in the Little Desert in western Victoria for farming led to a groundswell of community hostility across the State. Reports in the Melbourne

newspapers moved from small articles in obscure places to full pages, then multiple pages until these featured on pages two and three. Out of this debacle – which led to the resignation of the Lands Minister - a new Land Conservation Council was formed to evaluate future uses of all crown lands in the State including the future of the Eildon Water Reserve. More national parks were being proclaimed; older ones were being expanded.

The National Parks Service decentralised by implementing regional management to give more effective management of the increasing estate under their control. Many new senior positions were taken by Foresters who could see their chances of advancement within their 'own' organisation were limited and moved across to further their own career path. Of greater concern was, I believe, their different philosophical approach to conservation management.

I had been Secretary of the Victorian National Park Rangers Association for some years producing monthly newsletters. We had been agitating for more independent group status using the Country Fire Authority Officers Association as a model, and to have the wedge-tailed eagle adopted as our insignia. Dr. Smith wished to use the kangaroo! Despite this, (or because of this), the national park rangers, as a group, were suddenly placed into the public service. A training course to instruct rangers and give them academic credentials was started at the Forestry School, Creswick.

Early in 1976 – not long after returning from extended leave, the new director called me to the head office in Melbourne. I was asked about a large number of dead sheep recently seen in the park and told of a complaint from Mr. Swinburne, M.L.C., representing the owner of the stock. A draft letter of reply responding to this ministerial enquiry was taken from a drawer and tabled for my perusal. This stated some 25 starving sheep had been present in the park; some had been hit by cars and some had been driven into the lake and mauled by dogs. Most were found to be too weak to be driven. In effect, shooting all these animals had been an act of mercy. I protested that trespassing stock could have been handled by lifting the telephone and many of the dead stock were actually above a steep road cutting so couldn't have been hit by cars. But, I had to agree, in my absence on leave I didn't really know if the stock were starving or not, or were hit by cars or not.

The new director went on to extol the virtues of my transferring to a soon to be expanded coastal park in South Gippsland with a large recently refurbished house on Rotomah Island. It was apparent I was being presented with a 'fait accompli'. This was rather galling for I knew a different motive for the shooting (which pre-dated the creation of the park) was based on religious differences.

Mr. Swinburne was subsequently formally told 'sheep were driven out of the park a number of times'. He was also told 'the acting Head Ranger was brought up on a farm and understood sheep, and his assistant was an experienced farmer'. However, in my opinion, an un-necessary, disgusting and illegal act had been perpetrated and it was being covered up with a further act of chicanery. I was being drawn into this matter which occurred in my absence, but it appeared I had little real choice between transferring or staying.

Mr. FitzRoy, with his new found access to director, was unable to fathom why my 'standing' in the service had dissipated after 15 years of effort at Fraser National Park. The committee held a public testimonial dinner for Yvonne and I in a local hotel in appreciation of my services and presented us with a sum of money which we used to purchase an original oil painting of the lake area. Staff presented us with a large print copy of Lake Louise in the USA.

My time at Fraser had been far, far more than just a job between weekends. I had enjoyed meeting and helping people and put far more effort into the task than a 40 hour week required. As a result of

my efforts I had been upgraded twice, and had been the only park ranger to attend an interstate week long conference held at Royal National Park in Sydney in 1967.

I had the pleasure of a good long-term relationship with Mr. FitzRoy. Living in the country he enjoyed his cup of tea and, after the committee had departed, he would often join Yvonne and I in our dining room for afternoon tea. Undoubtedly, on these occasions, he would get to know me better and I found we could readily engage in open discussion perhaps on the background of matters previously discussed in formal committee meetings. His advice to me and general guidance over the years was both invaluable and appreciated.

I also recall one time soon after arrival in the district when local apiarist Lin Cumming asked me to hold my two hands in front and he poured what seemed to be millions of bees onto them, all without a sting. On my days off over the following years I would often go with Lin moving or robbing bees and developed an affection for the hobby keeping a few hives of my own in Gippsland and later in Queensland for some 30 years. As Lin got to know me better he came to accept more and more my observations and reports regarding rabbit control. He would often visit the park privately with family and friends and, of course, the lowering of rabbit numbers was obvious, as was the increase in kangaroo numbers.

The rationale for transferring was not handled well. After arriving at Rotamah Island, I found national park expansions had not taken place and were not going to happen any time soon. Not long after arrival I was also told I was expected to move to another house in the near future as the island house was to be a bird observatory. Camping was limited to about fifteen 'sites' in the old Lakes National Park. One of the areas scheduled for addition to the park was even to be set aside for 'managed' rabbit shooting! Other areas were to be managed for hunting hog deer. For me, at that time, after the activity of Fraser, it was almost a meaningless existence. Our move took on the overtones of a punitive measure.

Some 10 months after arriving in Gippsland we were told to move into a brand new house located in bushland near the entrance to the old Lakes National Park where we would be the first point of contact for all visitors to the park. After the extensive area of lawns at both Fraser and Rotamah Island it now seemed every time our children looked at the bare, black oily sand (ilmenite) they in turn were 'black'. They were suddenly 'restrained' by the environment after the freedom of sailing and fishing. It was just not possible to allow them outside and maintain any semblance of cleanliness and safety. After some 12 months in Gippsland I quit the department and in March 1978 I moved to take a position as District Ranger with the Queensland National Parks and Wildlife Service until 1995.

I believe great credit must be given to the committee who had overseen the development of what became a popular and well used recreation area, albeit officially a national park. Their patience over several years in dealing concurrently with two legally separate areas is recognised by myself and, I hope, members of the local community who had moved from initial scepticism, to wanting to help support the park. During my fifteen years at this park the committee - under the astute guidance of Chairman H. E. FitzRoy - provided a stable approach to management which also helped make our stay comfortable and enjoyable.

Minister Joan Kirner, in a personal letter to Mr. FitzRoy, later said “...the government, the National Parks Service and the community are greatly indebted to you and your committee for providing so much assistance to the park...”

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A university study into usage of the park demonstrated how park visitation was bringing hundreds of thousands of dollars into the local community annually.

