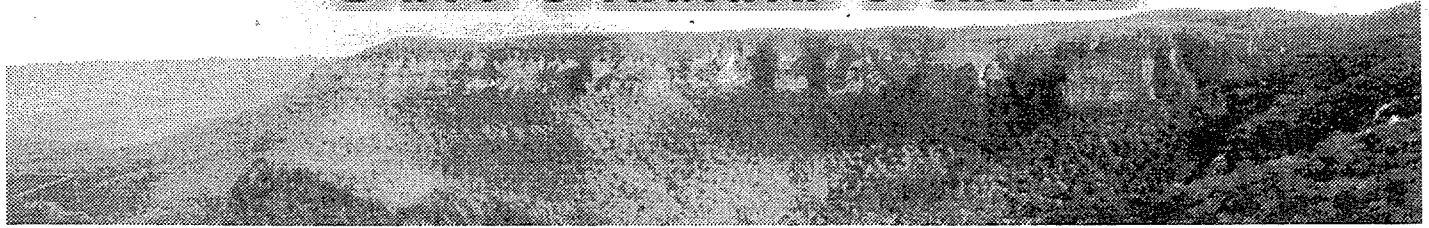


Save Radiata Plateau



Everyone knows how to get to Explorers Tree on the Highway, just two minutes by car from Katoomba provided that you have learned how to navigate the newly-scalloped Shell Corner; or an easy walk or a trivial bike ride. From that controversial marker, you can brace yourself for an assault on the Six Foot Track via Nellies Glen, or simply stroll back to town through the bush. But hey, why not wander a simple km further round Explorers Road, and proceed up to the end of Pulpit Hill Road. Then a locked gate indicates that you have reached **Radiata Plateau**, the last remaining undeveloped peninsula plateau in the upper Southern Escarpment, an invaluable green belt between Medlow Bath and Katoomba and a spectacular bushland experience for residents and visitors.

The Plateau basically comprises some land already proposed to be transferred to Blue Mountains National Park, some Crown Land reserved from sale, and crucially, a 305-hectare area privately owned (and undeveloped except for a small but now arid storage dam) by the Transcendental Meditation Organization, via one of its corporate arms (Maharishi's Global Administration through Natural Law Ltd). This owner now proposes to sell the land as three or more separate parcels available for development within its limited constraints of a zoning as Residential Bushland Conservation.

The BMCS is opposed to this fragmentation of Radiata Plateau by any development which will result in the loss of its high conservation value. The Society is therefore supporting the **SAVE RADIATA PLATEAU GROUP (SRPG)** in representations to the State government to acquire the property for incorporation within the National Parks system. **Accordingly, key spokespersons for the SRPG, Glenn Humphreys and Sandy Holmes, were invited to address the January general meeting of the Society**, a task that they both attacked with gusto, displaying meticulous research and a passion which is rare, even among environmental campaigners.

So what more did we learn of the pricelessness of the Plateau?

Historically, that it was a habitat of the Gundungurra people containing their essential resources for shelter, diet, tool making and artwork. And from the mid-1800s it provided an access to the Megalong Valley for miners and visitors. A network of easy Heritage walking trails now connects to three passes – Blacks Ladder to the west, Ben Esqate Ladder to the south and Bottleneck Pass to the south-east.



Articulate, seasoned and determined SRPG campaigners, Sandy Holmes and Glenn Humphreys, preparing for the Consoc Meeting.

Its combined western, eastern and southern aspects induce micro-climates which encourage substantial **biodiversity**. The Plateau contains heathland, swamp communities, open forest, tall open forest, fragile escarpment, windswept rock platforms, wide-ranging flora and fauna and endangered species. (It also of course contains some ridge-top radiata pine, a remnant of a failed plantation of the 1950s, which Sandy said has clearly lost the battle with the native bushland and which in her estimation infests no more than 0.25% of the total area! Argument perhaps for adopting the alternative name of Elphinstone Plateau, after Charles E. Elphinstone, NSW Surveyor-General and chairman of the Blue Mountains National Park Trust, 1959-65).

There are two **endangered plant species** on the Plateau, two of the ten known populations of the moisture-loving *Microstrobus fitzgeraldii* and two of the eight remaining colonies of the tall shrub *Leionema lachnaeoides*. The Spotted-tailed Quoll (*Dasyurus maculatus*) has been often sighted, and is endangered through loss of habitat and feral cat competition.

In convincing summary then, under the **Blue Mountains City Council Environmental Plan Acquisition Criteria**, the land for sale scores a whopping 94 points out of the possible 100 – 30 max. for a substantial relatively unpolluted water-course, 20 max. for significant vegetation cover, 8 out of 10 for slope effect, 25 max. for being contiguous with National Parks, 5 max. for size, 1 out of 5 for adjoining development, and 5 max. for formed road access.

Sandy explained that the land has a previous history of re-privilege by conservationists. TMO bought the holding during the 1970s. In the 1990s they proposed to build a 416-bed academy and the scheme received conditional DA approval from the Council. The **Save Radiata Plateau Group** came into being, supported by the Colong Foundation, the Total Environment Centre, the Nature Conservation Council, the NPWS, the BMCS and bushwalking groups. A petition of 2500 objectors was raised and 280 individual submissions were made, 278 against the proposal! Strong representations were made to both State government parties who both promised to bring the Plateau into public ownership. This was never achieved, but the DA approval was allowed to lapse.

With such success behind it, the SRPG has been reborn. On this occasion, the **BMCC is fully supportive** of the SRPG, attesting that the land should be incorporated into the National Parks system, and the Council has made such formal representations to the Premier, the Minister, the DEC and the SCA.

As Glenn pointed out, while the case for acquisition is strong, the government has indicated that their inholdings budget is committed and no more money is available. A story we have all heard before! **Thus the stage is set for an even more energetic rerun of the SRPG 1990s campaign, with most of the same concerned support organisations involved.**

Glenn and Sandy urged BMCS members to sign their petition and to utilise the circulated form letters to Messrs Carr and Debus. Or better still, to write expressing their own sentiments. Street stalls, advertisements and letterbox drops will follow. SRPG information is accessible and the Group may be contacted at <http://www.pnc.com.au/~anekozel/>, or by ringing Glenn Humphreys on 4782 5471.

Ron Withington