

Blue Mountains Conservation Society 40th Birthday Speech

Over the past couple of weeks I have skimmed through 40 years of minutes and scrap books in preparation for this birthday – our 40th. I have enjoyed doing it and have been swept along with the enthusiasm and inspiring, passionate love of the mountains that leapt out from the pages to greet me. Although, by the time I got to year 2001 I was quite overwhelmed!

I would just like to make some connections between the past and the present to show how the ideas, enthusiasm and activities of the early members have continued into the present time and still influence us today.

The starting place is with our beginnings. We know the official story of our origins – it was in Hut News recently. However, I came across this other story in Dulcie and Reg's photo album, which rang a bell for me, as I have become interested in education recently.

Dulcie and Reg say that many of the Society's founders were schoolteachers! - Schoolteachers they turn up everywhere – even our current President, Robin is a schoolteacher!

The story is, that Fred Astle, the first President was the District Inspector for Schools, John Buki was a teacher at WWFalls and Ken Carpenter was the Headmaster of WW Falls School. Les Hill and Ken White were also local schoolteachers. They talked about the *possibility of raising an interest in care for the environment with local school children.*

Allen Strom, [1914-1997] also a school teacher, became our Patron. He was also Chief Guardian of Fauna for NSW, and in 1977 was awarded an OAM for services to conservation education.

This interest in education at our very beginning helps explain why education was such an important activity in the old Hut. The old Hut's superb location, availability to the public and the fact that it was our home made it ideal for education. Educational activities continued for the next 30 years until the Hut was demolished in 1990.

Members have continued educational activities since, but in a different way – such as the \$3000 worth of books donated to set up the Environmental Reference Library in Katoomba and recent sustainable housing ecotours.

So a big thank you to those early schoolteachers and members for setting the educational path for us to tread.

Walking Track Standards were of concern to early members who worked hard clearing and signposting walking tracks around the Hut and Jamison Creek.

Isobel Bowden gave the name to The Nature Trail in the Valley of the Waters, and the Society gave the Charles Darwin walk its name. Our members obtained funding for major repair work to the Charles Darwin and The Transit of Venus Walks.

This is a great precedent to follow however, nowadays we lobby National Parks and Wildlife Service to fix the tracks! This is still track work too!

At this point I discovered something interesting – did you know that the Society predates NPWS? We are 8 years older than NPWS!

The Conservation Work that was started by our founding members is being continued today.

A big effort to protect swamps, creeks and woodland in water catchments started in 1974 with the formation of a committee, which became known as the Land Use Committee. This committee continues to strive and achieve protection for swamps and bushland today.

I can't talk about swamps without mentioning the Land Preservation Committee (1977). It has become a revered part of our past, because these members set out to find endangered swamps for purchase to donate back to Council for protection. Winsome Gregory and Graham Alcorn were the inspired people behind this action.

And in March 1987 a swamp (lot 6) in Taylor Ave, WWFalls was purchased for \$6000 and handed back into public ownership. This act was recorded as being an act of sincerity and commitment, to show Blue Mountains Council how important swamp protection was.

This year, we invented something new - Swamp Dances!—The swamp dance we held this year was fun and successful. There is a swamp display in the foyer to show we can be serious too.

The minutes for this era were pretty lively.

There were **protest** letters, **protest** meetings, **protest** campaigns – I suspect that the protest influence might have come from Graham or Wilson Alcorn! – You can take me up on that, in a minute Wilson if you like.

Sandmining

In the minutes I found an entry which read

What can we do to stop sand mining in the mountains? Some areas have been zoned for donkey years for extraction.

Well, that was 1981 and the campaign against the Bell sand mine.

Now in 2001 - 20 years later, we are still trying to stop a very big sandmine at Newnes Junction Some things never change!

The last campaign connection that I will mention is the Save the Boyd Plateau Campaign. This was a big and successful campaign during the mid 1970's which resulted in the plateau being included into Kanangra-Boyd National Park (in 1977). I'm sure that this connection with the Boyd land influenced members – as, 20 years later - in 1995 the Society donated \$40,000 to NPWS for the purchase of private land to be included in this National Park.

A big thank you to all the early campaigners for setting a fine example of campaigning for the Blue Mountains.

Council Business Papers: The getting of Council business papers is another tradition –It was just as hard to get the business papers on time in the 1960's as it is now in 2001.

Nursery activities – they have a long tradition too.

And I discovered a minute, which read *Could people please bring in empty wine flagons for the growing of native plants.* I'm not sure how they used the flagons for growing native plants but I bet early members had a happy time emptying them! This was 1979 and I am sure this tradition of emptying wine flagons still continues.

Thank you to Greta Vanry, now gone, and to Jill Dark for starting one of the Society's most successful activities.

And my last acknowledgement to the founding members is about refreshments – other than wine!

The present Café and the serving of refreshments are a continuing tradition from the old hut. The tradition of serving refreshments was begun by the Society's volunteers who worked weekends for 30 years.

There is one person who did lots of hut duty and is still involved in the Café, so in a way, the connection is still there. Who am I referring too? Barbara Towers of course.

Has anyone identified the current café lessees Barbara and Tony Towers in an old photo on the display stand?

So many thanks to all those makers of cups of tea and coffee over 30 years

Happy Birthday Blue Mountains Conservation Society.

Postscript 26th April 2021

Although the founding members named in the minutes were all men, it is necessary to be aware that their wives most likely were actively involved and contributed to the foundation of the Society too.

There were and are, many other members and activities worthy of mention in a full historical record, however this speech was meant to be a short for this social dinner.

Meredith Brownhill