



Dr NANCY BURBIDGE

(NPA President 1962 & 1969; Life Member 1972)

Dr Nancy Burbidge is generally acknowledged as the founder, in 1960, of the National Parks Association of the ACT (NPA ACT) and the prime mover and coordinator of the campaign for "A National Park for the National Capital". Nancy died in 1977, before her vision, Namadgi National Park, was realised.

The following article is reprinted from the NPA Bulletin 40th Anniversary Supplement, March 2000, to give readers an insight into this NPA legend.

Dr Nancy Burbidge – an active visionary

Nancy Burbidge was a foundation member and the second elected president of the National Parks Association during the formulation of the association proposal and an indefatigable worker towards her objective of *A National Park for the National Capital*. Unfortunately, she died in 1977 before her vision became a reality.

Two memorials commemorate her work besides Namadgi National Park. These are "The Nancy Burbidge Amphitheatre" in the National Botanic Gardens (for her work in botany) and a 1720 metre peak in Namadgi National Park, named to honour her in 1992. The peak forms a triangle with Mount Namadgi with its Aboriginal ceremonial stone arrangements, and Mount Kelly, named, it is thought, after a member of a survey team defining the watershed boundary of the ACT. The gazettal of Mount Burbidge fulfilled the fifth criterion in the naming of geographic features, that is "persons prominent in the area's development".

The ACT Environment and Land Planning Minister at the time, Bill Wood, said, "Naming the peak Mount Burbidge is particularly appropriate as Dr Burbidge was one of Australia's leading botanists, and her enthusiasm for the Australian bush also resulted in Molonglo Gorge and Gibraltar Falls Reserves being declared."

Nancy Tyson Burbidge was born on the 5 August 1912 in Yorkshire, England, and came to Australia with her parents in 1913 when her father was appointed to the Parish of Katanning in Western Australia.

Nancy graduated from the University of Western Australia with an Honours Degree in Botany and a free passage scholarship to spend 18 months at the Kew Herbarium. She received an MSc degree and studied the ecology and taxonomy of Western Australian plants at the Institute of Agriculture, University of Western Australia (1941–42) and at the Western Australian Forest Department (1942–43).

In 1943 she became Assistant Agronomist at the Waite Agricultural Institute, working on native pasture regeneration in the arid and semi-arid regions of South Australia. She came to the Division of Plant Industry of the CSIRO in Canberra as Systematic Botanist in 1946, expanding the plant collection which led to the establishment of the Herbarium Australiense.

Nancy was appointed as the Australian Botanical Liaison Officer at the Kew Herbarium in 1953–54. Between 1956 and 1965 she published revisions of a number of plant groups and the important *Phyto-geography of the Australian Region* which led to the first degree of Doctor of Science ever given to a woman by the University of Western Australia.

Her commitment as founding Secretary of the NPA, committee member for 11 years, and president for two terms, led to the proclamation of Namadgi as well as to the development of reserves at Molonglo Gorge, Gibraltar Falls and Tidbinbilla. Nancy singly and jointly contributed to many publications, some specifically on the botany of the ACT. The association publication *Mountains, Slopes and Plains* was published on the initiative of Nancy.

In 1972 Nancy became the first Life Member of NPA and in 1976 her work was recognised with her appointment as a Member of the Order of Australia, for services to science and the community.