



INTERVIEW WITH REG ALDER

(NPA Life Member 1984)

MATTHEW:- This is a transcript of a taped interview with Reg Alder by Matthew Higgins for the NPA Oral History Project taking place at Reg's home on 22 December 1999.

Reg, thanks very much for agreeing to be interviewed for the project, and I'm looking forward to hearing some of your memories of your NPA involvement.

Just to begin with though, some biographical details. Now, you were born in Adelaide in 1917 and moved to Sydney in 1921 and worked with the Navy for many years before coming to Canberra in 1970. We have covered aspects of your life, your outdoors life before in an interview for the Kosciuszko Huts Association [KHA] in 1990. I will just mention that for the information of anyone listening to the tape, as they might like to consult that one as well. Before we talk in detail of your NPA involvement from 1970, could we just briefly talk about your earlier bushwalking activities because I know that you were very big with the Sydney Bushwalkers and I would just be interested in hearing some of those earlier influences on you and getting out in the outdoors.

REG:- Well, my first taste of the bush came from my family when they used to take their annual holidays up at Leura and Katoomba and we would walk the tracks and so on there, and I presume that's where I got the feeling for it. An uncle of mine took us camping to Wattamolla in the [Royal] National Park which involved about a 12 mile walk. There were no roads then, there were only tracks to Wattamolla. We camped there and fished for the weekend, so that was a very memorable thing when I was about 10 or 12 years old.

Another thing I used to do was go out to Bunnerong Power Station as a friend there used to go fishing in the shallows. Bunnerong Power Station discharged the warm water from the condensers into the bay and the fish liked the warm water so it was very profitable for him.

I used to walk to Botany to my grandparents' place. They lived in the centre of Botany suburb and that was about a 5 mile walk and it was across and via the train line that ran from Sydney to Bunnerong Power Station to carry coal there. So I learned to balance on the train lines quite a bit then. Also the walk was past the Mascot aerodrome which was then only a grass paddock with a few sheds on it.

I became apprentice at Garden Island in 1933 and there, with a friend, a fellow apprentice, I was very interested in history, adventure sort of history. I had a book on Scott of the Antarctic and in that there was a photograph of the tents that they used. They were conical tents and so I made myself a calico one of the same design. I didn't realise at the time I made it that calico wasn't waterproof and when it rained you got quite a shower or spray of rain into it. The first major walk with the tent was to go from the Bunnerong valley from Wentworth Falls. It involved going out along the Kings Tableland and down a very steep road, which was called the 1 in 4, into the valley. That was over an Easter so that was a four day walk there.

MATTHEW:- And when was that, Reg?

REG:- That was when I was about 16 or 17 years old. The Bunnerong valley walk was with a friend, a mate from school. Then with my fellow apprentice, I went from Kurrajong to Mt Victoria which was quite a walk over a Christmas/New Year period. There was quite a bit of adventure in that, finding somewhere to sleep at night in some farmer's barn and being told to get out but then letting us stay in it when it was raining. Then finally, when coming home from Mt Victoria we got into an empty box carriage and after going for a while and when the train didn't stop at Katoomba there was a voice from under the seat saying "What station was that?" Having been told the voice crawled out and there was a chap sort of jumping the 'rattler' to go to Sydney; he jumped out at Strathfield. Just imagine what would have happened if two women had got into the



train.

Usually a lot of day walks to Burning Palms and along the Otford sea coast....

MATTHEW:- Royal National Park?

REG:- Yes, Royal National Park with my cousins, so that was quite an introduction to it. Then I acquired a bike for £3:10 from an uncle who could well have afforded to have given it to me, seeing I was only getting, at that stage, about £1:20 a week. So I went around on that quite a bit. A three day ride I remember was to go to Bargo and then down to Wollongong via the Macquarie Pass.

I was in the drawing office then at Garden Island, and one of the senior draftsmen knew my interests. He used to go off to Austral Bronze to do inspections and the chap out there was named David Stead and he was in the Sydney Bushwalkers, so he suggested that I might join the Sydney Bushwalkers. So it was arranged where they meet and so on, and so I went there. That was in October 1938. I had only been in it about six weeks, just before Christmas, and I was invited to go on an epic Kowmung trip that they were doing to follow the Kowmung River from its source down to the junction with the Cox [River]. I was a bit scared about all that because this group I was going with were known as 'The Tigers', and so I used to walk from Circular Quay home to Marrickville to get in training for it. Anyhow, I managed to cope with it all right. In the Sydney Bushwalkers there was Myles Dunphy, Marie Byles, Jo Turner, Dorothy Lawrie and Alex Collie whose names are well known in the past and the present environmental movement. Myles Dunphy, in particular, I remember him well getting up at meetings and speaking on environmental matters.

Another trip that I did was from Yerranderie over the tablelands down to the Wollondilly River. Yerranderie then was still an operational town. The store was still operating.

MATTHEW:- That was a silver mining town?

REG:- A silver mining town, yes. So that was quite an introduction to things. Then the war came and that meant that I had to seriously curtail my walking activities because I was required to work six days a week. Often I would knock off on Saturday afternoon and catch a train up to the mountains and race out and meet up with my more fortunate companions down at the Cox or Falconbridge or somewhere like that, or down in the Blue Gum forest.

Some of the memorable walks that I did! There was one Easter when we went down the south coast to Milton and up onto the escarpment to the Little Forest Plateau to a house, and then went over the tops of the ridges to Pigeon House Mountain and climbed it before there were any steps there. When I look at photographs today and see the number of people on top, I'm amazed that we got all up there safely, up and back again because it was quite a scramble to get up through a cleft at the top.

I was at Bouddi Nature Park, or National Park as it is now, with Marie Byles and worked there when they were building a shed with a water tank and so on. Also, quite a few trips down to the Blue Gum [forest] on working parties down there to help to divert the river from cutting away the banks.

One memorable 82 miles walk that I did was over a weekend from Friday night to Sunday night from Katoomba to Picton. There were eight of us on it and one was a woman.

MATTHEW:- Only two days basically and you did 82 miles?

REG:- Yes, it was 10 miles on the Friday night. We stayed in Carlon's homestead overnight and had breakfast there. She gave us a cut lunch and we then set off and walked 36 miles to McMahon's boarding house in the upper Burragorang valley. Then went on the Sunday, with another cut lunch to get to Picton, so that was quite a thing.



Another one that I did was from Nerriga to Wentworth Falls over three weeks and there was quite a lot [of trouble] when the drought broke. We had had a very severe drought in 1938 and '39. Streams and springs dried up and it was quite catastrophic around Sydney with fires; the Black Saturday of 1939, I think it was. However, we got to Nerriga and camped where the bus driver indicated near the bridge. We had only been there a little while, and the dry creek behind us sort of burst its banks and flooded our tents to a depth of about 6" of water, so there was a great scramble to get all our gear and stuff up into the trees. We were going to follow the Nerriga [River] down but we decided next morning that was too dangerous, and we went over the ridges and got to about half a mile from the junction with the Shoalhaven [River] and found the river was clear and running just normally. For a moment I thought I was on the wrong river, and when we had been there about half an hour the flood from last night came down about 3 ft high carrying all sorts of debris and a dead pig. So we made posthaste to get down to the Shoalhaven and get over on the western side, because we knew if we were cut off there our whole three weeks trip would be finished. So then we followed the Shoalhaven down for a while. We were going to swim through the 'Block-up' but decided that was too dangerous and took to the hills. When we got up near the top we met George Wells, as featured in 'The Man from the Misty Mountains' book, and there is quite a story about him, but it's a bit too much to relate here except that he was eccentric and a gold miner. Quite a good yarn from him in the book.

We went to Mt Franklin in about July/August of 1939. The chalet had only just been opened the year before. That was an experience because it was a very heavy snow season and the snow, I recollect, was down to Piccadilly Circus at least. We stayed there overnight, went down the Friday night and stayed there Saturday night with the people from Canberra. There were seven of us in our party and we went down in a hired car. To help with our skiing ability (I'd never skied before) we went to a place down at Woolloomooloo where a fellow sold and hired skis and we practised on a ramp in the building going down to the ground floor.

Another one I did was to walk from Brindabella to Tumut in a Christmas period, very hot. We rode from Canberra down to the Brindabella Valley in a mail car and then walked across to Tumut over the tops, Peppercorn Plain and down the Goobarragandra River to Tumut, then caught the train back to Sydney.

Another one was at Newnes where we went up over an Easter. Got out at the Clarence Junction and walked along the tops in the moonlight for two or three hours and then went down to Annie Rowan's clearing and then up the Wolgan Valley to the Newnes township, which then still had all the equipment from the shale mining activities in the First World War. The engines were still there and carriages, all the power station and retorts and a lot of the houses in the town were still there, with the churches, the pub, buildings and so on.

Another one in the war years, when Japan came into the war, and we weren't allowed or expected to take long travelling holidays and there were restrictions on travel on trains beyond the borders of the State. We were going to go on a walk from near Jindabyne down to the Snowy [River] and then up Jacob's River way to the tops, to the Pilot and around to Kosciuszko. Myles Dunphy had given us a lot of information on the trip. It was only in later years that I found out his information was about 10 to 15 years old when he gave it to us, so I just wonder now about the applicability of it when we came to use it because we had very little in the way of detailed maps. There was only the south-eastern tourist map, it was the main one you had. It was a very small scale and didn't have much detail on it. So instead of that as no-one else could get any holidays, I took my bike and went up to Bathurst, cycled to Mount Hotham via Crookwell, Yass, Tumut, down to Tintaldra on the Murray, across to Bright and up to Mount Bogong and Hotham. Then back again to Albury to catch the train.

MATTHEW:- How long did that take?

REG:- That took three weeks and I did 1,000 miles.



MATTHEW:- *On a pushbike.*

REG:- On a pushbike, on my own with a pack balanced on the luggage carrier on the back which was very unstable for the bike. It was very, very hot as I remember it.

Prior to that, I had gone canoeing. In the war years we took the canoe up to the Nepean River and then the authorities said you couldn't carry canoes or such like on trains, so there it was stuck up the Nepean and I couldn't get it to anywhere else. So I decided it was easier to save the 2/6d a week in the boatshed there and I'd get it back to Sydney. I made a cradle out of some bits of angle iron and a couple of old bike wheels and straddled the canoe with it, put an outrigger on it, fastened it to the luggage carrier of the bike and set off from Penrith to get it to Epping. I got as far as St Mary's and a weld broke on the frame, so I had to go back again the next week and fix it up. To pull it I had a very large sprocket wheel on the bike and it meant that your feet were going round like a threshing machine. Anyhow I got it up to Epping. One of the things on the ride was that I had to go over the bridge at Ryde and it was a toll bridge. It was normally a penny for the bike and sixpence or something for a car but the toll-man said I had to pay one and threepence because I had a trailer. That was something!

On the Bathurst to Mount Hotham trip, the normal sprocket on the bike broke and I had to put the chain over onto this big wheel [*sprocket*] which made it very difficult. It was all right going uphill, but going downhill your feet couldn't be going fast enough. Fortunately, a fellow with a load of bee-hives, came along and offered me a lift to Crookwell, but when I got there I understood what his offer of a lift was as I was expected to help him unload the hives. But I found a sprocket there and continued on my way.

With the canoe I had canoed from Tallong down the Shoalhaven [*River*] to Nowra and that was over a period of about ten days, of course, it was New Year period. I was with a group of two canoes. None of us had canoed before so it was quite an experience, but we became quite expert after a while. Also, I went up to the Nymboida River. I sent the canoe up by train to be consigned out to the Nymboida [*River*] near the power station and wondered whether it would be there when we got there. Anyhow, the canoes were there and we set off; it was fine weather, the river was good and we got to the junction with the Mann River, but then a great storm came and the river rose dramatically. We were held up for three days and finally decided to give it a go and went down to Jackadgery on a very high river which was probably very dangerous. From Jackadgery we then pulled out and went into Grafton.

I served on the committee of the Sydney Bushwalkers for two or three years.

MATTHEW:- *When would that have been, in the 1940s?*

REG:- Yes, early 1940s, 1941, '42, '43 it would have been about. That was quite an experience because of the environmental attitudes that the SBW had at the time and still have. They still have a conservation secretary and they are still very interested in conservation matters. I was assistant editor on the *Bushwalker Annual* for a couple of years preparing photographs for it and designing the cover of the *Annual*. That magazine lapsed after a few years, but it was quite an informative magazine with articles and photographs by members of all the clubs in Sydney.

I became interested in photography before I joined the Sydney Bushwalkers. I had a very small sort of box camera, then I bought an Ensign Selfix folding camera and then I bought a Voigtlander Superb twin lens reflex which cost about a month's wages. My parents were aghast at having spent all that money on it. I became interested in colour but the only film we could get in those early days was Dufay colour; it was very difficult to get a correct exposure on it, it was a very dense film. Then Kodachrome became available in the early 1940s and I switched to that and had quite a bit of success with it. During the war one of the assignments I had was to go to the army hospital at Croydon and give a show to the nurses that were there. Coloured slides then were really a novelty.



MATTHEW:- So, these were slides from your walking trips you were showing?

REG:- Yes, the walking trips, from the trip I did on the Nerriga and all that sort of thing. I went there, but I didn't know I was going to be the star turn. When I got there I discovered I was the turn for the night and so it was a bit of a shock to discover I had to do the whole show.

The *Sydney Sun* came out with a colour supplement and I thought I would give it a go and ask whether they were interested. Colin Simpson of the Europe and Wake Up series of travel books was the editor at the time, and he literally grabbed my photographs and put them in a colour supplement which was very unique then. His was the first newspaper colour printing that had been done. I got £20 for that which was equal to about three weeks wages at the time, so that was something for me.

I continued to be interested in photography. I did a lot of black and white photographs in those days. I made my own enlarger with a magnifying glass for a lens. One of the things that was unique with the bushwalking was that I used to take a roll of film and make a print from every negative, whereas other people would make a print and you might only see one from the roll that they took. I had quite a sort of little minor income by making prints of trips that I did.

MATTHEW:- Selling the prints, you mean.

REG:- Selling to friends at minimum cost no doubt, but at least it paid for my negatives and paper and so on.

I acquired some land at Epping, it was 10 acres. It was completely covered with bush. It was 10 acres for £100 at the time and I had the idea of building on it. I wasn't able to do any building then because of the war years. But when the war finished and materials became available I had a plan all drawn up. Then the Cumberland County Council brought out a master plan for Sydney which showed the uses for all the land, whether it was industrial or parks or houses or whatever it might be and my block of land, which was in a farming area, was still shown for that purpose when I bought it. They put on a display in the Sydney town hall for three months for public comment and I went and had a look. My land was OK, but a friend about two or three weeks before the exhibition finished, said "You know your land's in the green belt". I said, "No, it's not" but he said, "Well you had better go and have another look". I did and they had changed the category of the land during the course of the exhibition, so I then learned, for my first time, how much public relations are, it's only just a front. I had a great fight with the Cumberland County Council, going as far as the [State] Premier and having letters from him. Eventually I was told that I could build on it, provided I had the foundations in by the time this zoning became law. I managed to get some bricks and put the brickwork up to the floor level and put the floor down. Then had to wait because I had to wait another 12 months to get the bricks to complete the house. I built the house myself then.

I acquired a car about 1947. It was a Chrysler 6 cylinder open tourer and I went off car camping from then on; not that I didn't do any bushwalking, but the car camping was the main thing because it took me much further afield. There aren't many roads in NSW, Victoria or South Australia that I haven't been on. Also later on I went from Sydney to Perth, also to Ayers Rock, a circuit tour, and up as far as Port Douglas by the inland route and back by the coast. So I acquired quite a big knowledge of Australia through all that.

MATTHEW:- And you were married by this time.

REG:- Yes.

MATTHEW:- And Doris came with you.

REG:- Yes. I put up a proposition to the Navy that it would be advantageous to get experience in the UK and eventually it became my turn. I was transferred to Melbourne for six months to get experience before going to England and whilst I was there, from where I was living at Bondi



Beach on the Bay, Doris and I roamed all around as far as we could go every weekend and skied up in the hills behind. So that was quite something. Then I went to England for two years 1954-55. From England I took three weeks leave, we acquired a car and went over to the continent and toured the continent for the three weeks. So I've got quite a bit of experience in that area.

Then I was back to Melbourne from 1955 to 1958 and my daughter Marjorie was born there, and we roamed around as much as possible with her. I came back to Sydney in 1958, built another house on the remaining section of land that I had at Epping and I joined the NSW NPA. It was because of the family commitments that it was only a support role. I went to outings and lectures with them but I got some idea of their activities. I knew most of the people who were in the NPA then because Tom Moppett of the Sydney Bushwalkers was one of the founding members with Allan Strom from the Caloola Club; so the nucleus of the NPA was a large number of Sydney bushwalking people.

As I said, I went to Ayers Rock.

In 1964, I took long service leave and went round the world. I had ten months leave. It was unusual for anybody to take leave before they retired. I went through the Panama Canal via NZ and Peru, called in at Haiti and then to the States. I went across the States to my sister in Kansas and back out to New York and across to London. There I bought a Bedford Dormobil, and with the family set off to roam around Europe for six months covering the whole of Europe east to the Russian block; as far south as Greece and up to the Arctic Circle in Norway. So I gained a knowledge of history and heritage value of things and also of parks.

So I was then transferred to Canberra in 1970, and I immediately joined the NPA here. I took part in their early outings and attended all their monthly meetings. The early outings in those days were only once a month, and they were called outings and they were outings in the real sense of the word, and not walks as we might term it today. Nancy Burbidge and others would take you out and stop off at places for a botanical thing or birds or geology; 'Shearsby's Wallpaper' down on the Goodradigbee.

MATTHEW:- So they were instructive sorts of outings?

REG:- They were all instructive outings. Went with Jennings to the cave at Wee Jasper.

MATTHEW:- Joe Jennings?

REG:- Joe Jennings. The cave at Wee Jasper village, not the Carey's Caves. So we went down in there. There was a great bit of problem then, or thought to be a problem, of going into caves and getting a virus I suppose it was, from bat droppings which if they got into your lungs couldn't be cured. Anyhow, about 70 people turned up and we had to go into the cave in relays at that time. There were lots of other outings. We could go right to Mount Gingera, drive right to the foot of it in those days. The locked gate was beyond Gingera, and it meant they were outings in the sense that you only walked from the base of Gingera up to the top.

That was a day's outing to go up there and have a look at the Bogong moths. I mean you just sort of picnicked there, enjoyed the sunshine, walked back and slowly came back through all the dust with a great convoy of cars. There were lots of camping weekends. We camped up at Mount Franklin. Mount Franklin [*Chalet*] was available then for groups to stay overnight in. There were a number of outings down the coast. Ian Currie used to lead a lot of car camps. One was memorable, I'm not sure on whose property it was, it might have been Manning Clark's, but we camped in this area just back from the beach, and just before dusk the ABC descended upon us. They had a group of people who were going to have the experience of living out of the bush for a week but they arrived with a great bag of oatmeal as their basic staple diet. They were quite surprised and a bit annoyed to see us there. The people were supposed to have been picked randomly, but when you saw it on TV later they had all the different types of people - the dumb blond and the



practical bloke and all that. So it was quite a joke to see how they put the whole thing together. They had this isolated place on the coast, you know, that no-one ever got to and all that sort of thing, so it was quite a thing.

As I said, the early outings were simple sort of things, but a few of us sort of wanted to do something more. I went on my first packwalk with Bill Watson, Julie Henry and Bill Adams. We walked from the Mount Clear homestead up to the flats and to the corner of the ACT, camped on the flats, then walked up to Mount Clear and then came down off the face of it for the weekend's walk. So that was my first packwalk with them.

A few of us then sort of decided we needed something more than just these monthly outings, and a group of us, Jan Kiek, Andrew Fordham, Pat Jeffries and Neville Esau started to have a walks committee meeting and started the weekly walks with longer day walks and weekend walks. But the instructional side of walks lapsed because there weren't people to give them. A lot of the walks we did in those days have become classical walks in a sense, they were exploratory as far as we were concerned, and where we walked through the bush on our walks it was scrub bashing and nothing to lead us; but today if you go and do the same walk you'll find a well beaten track. This has been brought about by the upsurge of people walking, particularly Outward Bound who lead people on particular routes and the upsurge of people with FBI.

MATTHEW:- This is the Family Bushwalkers?

REG:- Yes, the Family Bushwalkers and all the other walking groups around the place now, plus people are walking now not with clubs but on their own. So that a lot that we did has become written up in Graeme Barrow's books and so on.

MATTHEW:- Can you give me an example of one route?

REG:- Well, one was going through the gap in front of Mt Gudgenby. We walked up the first time on the right hand side of the creek and got ourselves into an awful lot of scrub bashing, and then coming back we came down the other side and found it was quite reasonable. There was no track but today, if you go up there now, you can follow a track up through the gap. In various other places you find a beaten track now but there wasn't anything 30 years ago.

I worked initially with the *[NPA] Bulletin* on the three monthly mail out, wrapping and sorting, postcode sorting and so on. Then I joined the committee in 1978, and about that time Ian Currie put the screws on me to become editor of the *Bulletin*. I was editor of the *Bulletin* for six years altogether.

MATTHEW:- 1978 to 84?

REG:- Yes, and I brought quite a few changes to it. When I took it over it was just a newsy little sheet with not a great deal of the Association activity reported in it. It was also type written and I set about reforming the whole thing. It was on quarto size paper and I put it up to the committee that we could go to A4 and it would cost us no more because quarto paper, I think, was even a bit more expensive than A4 even though it was smaller. We could get more substance into it by the increase in size of the paper.

I increased the size of the *Bulletin*. I then had trouble with the typists because one couldn't cope with the amount of stuff needed to be typed, so I got another lady but they had different size fonts in their typewriters, it was a 10 and 12, and that created a bit of a problem. I didn't want to have the two different sizes of types in the one issue, and so I experimented with one issue by reducing type to all one size by having different length of lines of text and then reducing it on a photocopier. That created quite a bit of scream from a lot of people because they reckoned the type was too small, but actually the type was the same size as a newspaper font but I gave that up. So I then found out there was a lady, quite near, who was doing typesetting and she had a Remington machine which could right justify and give a nice clear font, but she didn't have any



range of capitals, apart from the normal range on the machine. She did it quite cheaply, and then suddenly she went and upped her price. So I looked up the pink pages and found another lady down here in McGregor and she had a bigger range on her machine, but I didn't go for any fancy heading types because that was going to cost quite a bit more money. I kept the cost of the *Bulletin* down very close.

I had problems with printers. We used to go to Kelly in Garran but he couldn't produce any decent photographs and then I went to another one called Harvest Press. He had just started up and he was very cheap, but he was so cheap he went broke after about nine or twelve months. Then I went to a chap called Kelly in Scullin, he quoted a price on the basis of so many pages and I kept him screwed down to that price for the 6 years. I'd say, well I've got so many pages for this issue, mathematically this was so much and with so many copies of issues and so I kept the price very constant.

I instituted the photographic cover when it was with Kelly [of Garran]. I had four issues with him because of the cost of the block for the cover which was going to distinguish one issue from the other by a different colour cover. This didn't work because although he promised he would do better next time, I think he got worse with the printing of the cover, and so that's when I went over to these other people and got a much better job.

I also stuck to a very close deadline. I organised everything so that the *Bulletin* would be available for the monthly meeting, and I distributed to those who were there that could take it and also people who could deliver some took some also. So I saved about a third of the cost on postage and I kept the whole production in very close rein, keeping to a strict timetable and the costs. Subsequent editors didn't seem to worry about that, they went to all sorts of fancy fonts for the graphic design part of it which increased the costs quite considerably. Also no-one seems to have stuck to my timetable and they reckon people wouldn't deliver or take them. The cost of postage is proportionally a lot more now than it was then: when it's \$1,000 or something like that quite considerable savings could be made.

The other thing that I did, to save costs, was the layout. I got the galley proofs from the typesetter and arranged the whole thing for the printer. I also did most of the collating and stapling. I found it was difficult to get people to come as a group when you wanted them to do anything, and while I was waiting for them I found that I could do a lot of the things myself seeing I was retired. We put a lot of photos into it.

MATTHEW:- Yes, there were a lot of your photos in the Bulletin.

REG:- I was the only one producing photographs in those days, but anybody else that had photographs I would put them in. There weren't as many photographs then as are put in today because the cost of the system available then to produce photographs was more expensive than it is today. As I say, it was \$20 for the plate for the cover which kept you a bit restrained.

MATTHEW:- The Glendale tree project. I see you've got there in 1983. Would you like to talk about that?

REG:- The road was sealed from Glendale onwards. When I first came down the road it was only sealed as far as where it went off to the Orroral Valley for the Tracking Station. They had this big depot just north of the Glendale Ranger Station for all the bulldozers and graders and various other paraphernalia including storage of oil and tar and gravel and so on. So this looked to be a spot that had to be regenerated and so it was decided it was a project that would be fitting for the Association. We got approval for it and Charles Hill took the lead in it, and a number of us also were assisting him in all sorts of aspects of it. It was decided to collect seeds from the surrounding area, four varieties, germinate the seeds in boxes, then individual plants picked out and planted into milk cartons. These were distributed around members of the Association for nurturing until they were ready to plant out. Of course, I think the cost of a seedling from the Forestry



people was going to be about \$1 each so there was a big saving.

So we had a great plan for planting made, and we had a great day there one day planting them all out. We had old tyres to put around plants because someone had said that rabbits didn't like the smell of tyres and wouldn't go over tyres, but I don't know whether that's an old wives tale or not. Also from some of the old fencing in the park, we cut up netting to put around plants and stakes to hold them up. We also arranged we'd go out and do a bit of watering so it was quite a big project, but everything was against us, I think. Although the Parks Service put rip lines in for us to plant the trees into, I think the soil had been well and truly poisoned in a lot of instances by the oils and tars and stuff that were used on the road working. Then we had some years of very dry weather and also a very serious insect attack on the trees and one species, I think it was the snow gum, disappeared altogether. Today there are only about 60 plants left, some quite healthy and others still stunted, out of the 450 plants that were put in.

MATTHEW:- Well, was it worthwhile to do nonetheless, do you think?

REG:- Well, it's starting to grow up now after all this time. You can drive past and see some trees there now which would have been bare otherwise, I feel sure. Probably another 15 or 20 years or so some natural regeneration might take place too, and the ones that are only a metre or so high might suddenly decide to get a go on and get their roots into some more fertile soil.

In 1983 we had the great fire which started over on [Mt] Scabby and swept right across the Gudgenby/Yankee Hat area into Rendezvous Creek, and didn't stop until it got to the other side of the Adaminaby Road. It lasted for three weeks altogether. The NPA wanted to go out and assist with the fire fighting but they wouldn't allow us from the compensation point of view. I feel sure we could have done some things out there without actually bashing the fire. But we went to the emergency service depot in Dickson and grilled steaks and buttered bread, and prepared meals for the people out in the field. This was done on the evening shift, we worked until about 10 o'clock or so and then the eskies were taken out to the people in the field for their midnight snack. The fire was really devastating, it absolutely cleared the land on the hillsides leaving nothing except the charred big trees. The fire was so hot that great slabs were blasted off the rocks by the heat. A few of us did a survey; we walked across the hills to see what the damage was and also the full length of all the fire trails which had been put in in emergency. It was decided that the emergency fire trails would be allowed to go back to nature, but the one up to Nursery Swamp it was decided that we would assist in helping nature by sowing infertile grass seeds. We worked on that for several weekends, sowing the seeds.

MATTHEW:- So that was exotic grass, that's why it was infertile, so it would die after a while?

REG:- Yes, it would germinate and stay there to consolidate the soil until it died but it didn't reseed the area around. It involved dragging a lot of logs across the track so as to divert water and scratching the fire trail to sow the seed in. Fortunately, there was rain and we had very good germination of the seed and it did quite a good job of holding the soil back on it.

MATTHEW:- How many NPA members participated in that work?

REG:- I'd say about 20 probably - quite a gang of us. The other fire trails which we didn't work on, going over to Rendezvous Creek and down Rendezvous Creek and up to the hills beyond, have revegetated themselves now, so that it's hard to find where the fire trail was. You'd have to be very alert to sort of find it. In Nursery Swamp an overhang was discovered in the early 1980s with some Aboriginal paintings on it. It was kept very secret. Fiona [Brand] and I decided we would try and find it and we eventually found it. The fire came through there after this discovery and the area around it was absolutely bare, but the heat didn't damage the paintings. Now the bush has all grown up around it and you'd hardly know what it was like when it was bare. Today they're trying to keep this place secret but there was a Heritage Week walk in the early 1980s and about 95 people turned up. You can imagine the snake of people going up to the cave.



MATTHEW:- So this was an NPA led walk?

REG:- The NPA with the Heritage or Archaeological or Anthropological Society or something or other. Anyway it was a joint led walk. The anthropologists stopped us all before we got to the cave and we had lunch, and then we were all taken up in groups to look at the Aboriginal paintings and back again. You can imagine 95 people tramping along consolidated a track into the place and of course, that made it available to everybody. 95 people know and everybody tells somebody else and so what's to be a secret today is no longer a well kept secret, and anybody who knows where it is can go and find it. But they have made attempts today to close off the track. The track into Nursery Swamp no longer leads you towards it so that's been done.

First of all the Gudgenby Nature Reserve was declared in 1979, I think it was. Then when Tom Uren came, he came with the idea that we ought to have a national park, so he declared the Gudgenby Nature Reserve to be Namadgi National Park under the Nature Conservation Act, which was not a national park act at all but he had the authority by that act to declare a reserve and give it a name so to call it Namadgi National Park. It was a bit of a trick.

MATTHEW:- What do you mean by that, because there was no National Park Act?

REG:- There was no National Park Act, so there was no legal basis to call it a national park except that he could give a place a name. He could have called it anything else but to call it a national park was really a cover, that we had a national park when we didn't really have a national park. So I wrote an article in the *Bulletin* pointing all this out and the article was headed Namadgi Notional Park. It created quite a bit of letter writing back from the bureaucrats about trying to justify what wasn't.

MATTHEW:- So has the legislative background to the park been strengthened since then?

REG:- I think so, yes, the Act has been changed, I believe, although I don't know the full details. I did know it 20 years ago or so but I have forgotten the full details of it.

So when it was named we decided to have a celebratory walk. We walked up Middle Creek and camped at Upper Creamy Flats and went up on the top.

MATTHEW:- To the top of Namadgi Peak?

REG:- Yes, the top of Namadgi Peak. We took some champagne up, a couple of bottles, and had a celebration there. We came off Namadgi [Peak] on the eastern side opposite Mount Burbidge down to Rotten Swamp and then to Mount Kelly at Sam's Creek.

MATTHEW:- And who was on that walk?

REG:- Neville Esau and Fiona and I and Jack Smart. I've got photographs of it with the people in it but I just can't remember all, there was about ten of us who went up.

MATTHEW:- Had you yourself been personally involved in the ongoing campaign for a national park? Had you gone to meetings with the Minister or anything like that?

REG:- No, I wasn't on the Committee in those earlier days but I was conscious of what was going on from the meetings and so on. I wasn't at any ministerial meetings and so on because I wasn't on the Committee then.

Then they brought out a management plan, a draft plan for Namadgi and we went through it line by line and made quite a number of recommendations for inclusion in the plan. These went back to the Department and finally the final plan came out. We were most disappointed to find that none of the recommendations we had made were included in the plan. It was a great public relations exercise but it was just an exercise, as there was nothing to show. The Department had made up its mind what they are going to have in it, and that was that. They had the exercise, you've had your say, and that's the end of it. The only thing that was changed in it was the edito-



rial type things, corrections and also a statement on Aboriginal....

MATTHEW:- Aboriginal heritage?

REG:- Yes. So all our effort, and I feel a lot of the things we respond to today are in a similar vein, just public relations so they can say, "We've done this, you've had your say, we've already made up our mind on this and that's it, whatever you say, it's not in".

MATTHEW:- The Australian National Parks Council?

REG:- I didn't want to but I was pushed into becoming the Australian National Park Council national coordinator.

MATTHEW:- So this was a Council of all the different State NPAs?

REG:- All the NPAs but some of the other States are not NPAs, they have got different conservation sort of names and so on. I found it was most ineffective. I got no feedback at all from all these State groups. They used to have their annual conference which didn't achieve very much, a lot of talk, and at the end of it they would pass a number of motions, make a press release, then go back for the rest of the year and forget about them. One year I went there, the President said, "I must apologise, I'm afraid I've done nothing this year", so that will give you some indication of what use they were. What it does today I don't know; it may be just following the same thing; have an annual meeting, have a chat and so on, then go back and things go on.

MATTHEW:- Yes, there is mention in the Bulletins of you and I think Neville Esau in 1985 going to Melbourne and then you went in 1986 as well, so it's about that time we're talking about?

REG:- We talked quite a bit about Nancy Burbidge, particularly with Fiona [Brand] because she knew her so well. I knew her, too, in my early days.

I'd said a few times that something ought to be done to perpetuate her memory, and it was often said we ought name a mountain. I've forgotten who suggested it, but I think I might have, that the mountain next to Namadgi, which is observable from Mt Gudgenby, should be called Mt Burbidge. So when I worked on the Yerrabi Track and made the panoramic sketch of all the hills and mountains around that you could see from the track, I put Mt Burbidge on it. I didn't ask anybody, I just put it there and there was no sort of upsets; nobody officially said anything about it.

My idea was that we've got the three mountains, we've got Namadgi which has its Aboriginal connotations and Kelly, which you [Matthew] have now found was posthumously named after one of the survey team on the border survey, and Mt Burbidge after Nancy who had the main idea for a national park. The three things should be perpetuated as a triangular thing in the middle.

I also tried to interest the Aboriginals in naming a similarly high peak which is on the Rendezvous Creek ridge north of [Mt] Burbidge; to give that an Aboriginal name of their choice. I gave Arnold Williams and Matilda House all the necessary official information they needed to do it, but they've never done it, maybe that's the way the Aboriginals work, I don't know. You can't push them, you can lead them, but you can't push them and that's the end of it.

MATTHEW:- Perhaps Arnold and Matilda didn't see it as appropriate to put a name or whatever?

REG:- Well, they said they were going to do it but they never did. I thought it would have been appropriate for the four highest peaks, or isolated peaks in central Namadgi, to be named. We got all the official papers and things and put it in. There was some thought earlier, you know, on how did you go about getting features named in the ACT. We put it in and it came back approved in a very short time. We were rather surprised how easy it was that it was accepted.

MATTHEW:- Is it shown as Mt Burbidge on the new version of the Namadgi Park map?

REG:- Yes, but I had to go and ask for that to be done. When we asked for it to be done it was forgotten about, and it was a last minute inclusion. So that battle's been won, I hope.



One of the big projects I was on was the Orroral homestead. Right from the beginning, Ross Carlton was the main person, as President, in putting forward the idea of the homestead becoming a long-term project for the NPA to work on. As it turned out it was a very long-term project. It started off very quick, we had big working parties there clearing the homestead out. One of the rooms was full of hay which had been put in through the window and blocked the door so you couldn't open it. So we had to climb in through the window and get some out to open the door up. It had been in there so long that the strings had all rotted, so you couldn't lift a bail out as a single piece. Some you could, but most you couldn't. So it was a question of wheelbarrowing it all out, then put in a great heap and eventually disposed of.

MATTHEW:- This was about 1983?

REG:- Yes. There was a lot of artefacts and stuff in the rooms which were taken away by the Parks Service as we were clearing up around the place. We had money to do a bit of work on it and that was spent on putting a fence around it to keep the rabbits away and also to prop the veranda up.

The next thing was that money was found for conservation plans for the homestead and an archaeological survey. Measured drawings were produced by students from the University of Canberra. There was one point in these drawings; they make a point of how the unusual part on the rear wall of how the wall is supported, and they make the proposition that this piece of wood and hangers at the top end of the wall were there to stop the wall falling out because it had rotted at the bottom. I dispute that opinion. I investigated it and if you consider that you have top and bottom wall plates with a groove in each of them and the walls are slotted into it, if the walls rotted at the bottom and were about to fall out of the top, you would certainly need to drop it down a bit so that it would engage in the bottom wall plate. But examination of the wall shows that the top of the walls are pulled up hard into the top wall plate.

MATTHEW:- The slabs are pulled up tight into the top wall plate?

REG:- Yes, into the top wall plate and if it was rotted at the bottom it wouldn't pull them hard up. You might pull them half way up so that they engage in the bottom and the top. I think this feature of this hanging is quite an unusual one in that the person who designed it, obviously to me, wanted to pull the bottoms of the wall slabs up out of the slot in the bottom so that they wouldn't be in water all the time.

MATTHEW:- That's the slot in the bottom plate?

REG:- In the bottom plate and it would be rotting there. It was unusual, well not unusual but you could see, when the bottom wall plates were taken away, how they were made. They were drilled with an auger, about a 2" auger as you can see the marks of the screw and the cutting on them all the way along the things, so that is quite an interesting thing. Also, the wall plates showed the mark of them having been pit sawn as you can distinguish the change of angle of the saw as it advanced along the log wood.

Up the valley there is an area marked for a timber reserve, and also a creek called Sawpit Creek. We went up there to see whether we could find any signs of a sawpit. We searched everywhere we thought it was possible to have one and found no signs of it, but it is quite possible that the timber for the homestead came from up there. A sawpit doesn't necessarily have to have a pit. You can have a gantry with the log on the top of it, and people work underneath it. If it was all timber 150 years ago, it has probably all rotted away by now and there would be no sign of it remaining. I saw this type of sawing being done in Bhutan with a gantry and a man underneath and one on top. So that was quite something.

The homestead remained in the doldrums for approximately ten years and I wrote an article for the *[NPA] Bulletin* called 'Ten Years of Neglect' and pointed out how the homestead was rotting



away and in danger of falling down. My opinion was that the homestead may have had the fate of the kitchen except that the homestead was supported each end by masonry walls. This gave the whole building some stability because the wall plates were completely rotted on the rear wall, and all the posts supporting this structure were rotted through at their base. So the whole thing was hanging or subsiding down, but I think that, except it had the support of the rear end on the chimneys, it might have fallen down.

It was coincidental that there was a seminar at Jindabyne on the cultural heritage of the Alps and the state of the Orroral homestead was brought up there and that was a trigger for the Department to find some money. They only found a little bit and the contractor employed only had three weeks available to do the job. So in some ways the work carried out wasn't quite as it should have been, in that it didn't fully follow the terms of the 'Burra Charter'. In particular, the supports for the flooring were replaced in conventional 4"x2" bearers and joists as in a modern building and that wasn't replicated. Also, the posts supporting the roof were not checked out to support the wall plates. Subsequently I brought up this omission to the Parks Service and they made the park workers available to me, and we corrected that so the bottom wall plates are now supported on the posts as they were originally. Other work not done was the gable - the gable end

MATTHEW:- And this was not done at the time because there wasn't time to do it?

REG:- There wasn't time to do it and so I and others of the Association took the job over. The timber was obtained by the Kosciuszko Huts Association to replace side planks on the Rowley's homestead and there was supposed to be enough timber to do this end gable. When we came to do the job, in spite of asking many times whether there was sufficient timber, when we came to do it we found there wasn't enough and we had to do some dummying up sort of work to finish it.

I insisted that we had a staging to work from, we weren't going to work from ladders up at that height, and the staging supplied by the Parks Service wasn't of the best. I doubt that it would have passed an inspector. Its parts were held together with wire. It had no kick boards or guard rails and the staging planks they supplied to us weren't the ones we really needed for the job. Anyhow, the job was done and that completed the thing. The main work that the Association did on the restoration of the homestead was assisting the contractor.

When the flooring was lifted up the rabbits had been underneath and there were great piles of earth. We dug about 9" to 1 ft of earth out from under the floor so as to give more air space and make it drier. Also, behind the back wall we dug out down to about 1 ft so as to bring the outside ground level down below the wall plate. It is interesting to see that when we did that we found a large number of beer bottles, about 9" or so down in the earth and they were dated in the early 1950s so that this amount of earth had been washed down over that period and built up against the building. So it's now down below it, and there's some gravel there to sort of drain the water away.

One later job was that we worked on the chimney. Kosciuszko Huts Association assisted with that. Parts of the stone work had fallen out of the chimney and it was all re-jointed with cement. Later on there was some discussion about whether the chimney should be rendered on the outside as it was originally, or whether it should be left. A stone-mason we had wanted to coat it with a linseed oil compound to make it look shiny and pretty. Anyhow, finally a decision was made that it would be cement rendered and bring it back to what it was. It's my opinion that it was originally cement rendered because the chimney stone work only had weak clay holding all the stones together, and I think it was rendered so as to make it more waterproof and also to stop dampness coming into the house.

It was a very long job. Then finally the original surveys recommended that there should be a drainage trench around the homestead to take water away from it. The contractor also recommended it, but the Parks Service said they weren't going to do it. I brought it up to the Parks



Service that it should be done and they agreed then from a higher level of the Department. A trench was dug about a metre deep, and a plastic membrane inserted into it from right round the back of the house and down each side, and so now any ground water is diverted from the house. One thing we did notice was that there had been a well down below the homestead. It's got some stone work around it and I was out there the other day and found it had filled with water which I hadn't noticed before so it was something I found.

MATTHEW:- Just before we go on, Reg, you made the point earlier about the Burra Charter and I think the point should be made with sub-floor work, I mean commonly modern materials are used in sub-floor work where it can't be seen. I mean, that happens on KHA work parties so maybe you are being a bit stringent in bringing the Burra Charter in regard to the sub-floor work?

REG:- But still you are supposed to restore it back to what things are. I know it's out of sight but that's the point about it.

Whilst we were working on the homestead, the [*adjacent*] 1950s house had been standing there and had been vandalised to some extent. We found a person removing timber from it. We brought this up to the Park Authorities and the person was stopped removing it, but later on we came back and found he was having another go at it and we brought that up again. Now all that is left of that building is some brick work up to floor level and in a number of areas it's been kicked down. It looks rather desolate at the moment.

With KHA, a number of members of NPA are also members of KHA, we worked on Rowley's, Orro-ral [*hut*]; jacking it up and re-timbering the sides of it. Unfortunately, shortly after that was finished a couple of chaps were sleeping in it, made too large a fire and the hut burned down. Unfortunately in the conservation plan it said it wasn't to be replaced, and now there are just a few ashes around and that's all that's left of it.

We also worked on the Hospital Creek hut with KHA to put a drainage trench around the back of it and also to clean the area up. There was a problem in that the material supplied was road base material to put in the trench and, of course, was unsatisfactory. We had to have a race to try and get some substitute gravel, and that was obtained from the Orro-ral homestead. Then there was a problem getting it down to the hut. We were expected to wheelbarrow it down - a distance of about 3/4 kilometre which was obviously, when you had about 5 tons of material to wheel down, out of the question. So we cut some logs, ran our trucks down and put the logs back but that incurred some displeasure from the Parks Service for having done that. Anyhow that's been done.

MATTHEW:- The situation there was that the work party cut the logs, moved them aside to make a track and then put the logs back on the track?

REG:- Yes, exactly as they were placed, the same logs. I couldn't see any real problem in doing that as the area isn't open to the public so cars would not necessarily go down there because if they were on the main Old Boboyan Road, they would be illegally there anyhow for a start.

MATTHEW:- Because of the locked gate?

REG:- The locked gates at each end of the road. Just digressing on that, that road was supposed, under the first Management Plan, to be updated and become a tourist road which has never been done.

MATTHEW:- How do you think cultural heritage has been recognised in the park? When NPA started out, it would appear, purely out to conserve the natural heritage of the park and yet by 1994, I think it was, the objectives of the Association were changed to include cultural heritage, so obviously there has been a change in NPA over the years?

REG:- And also in the Parks Service. The Mount Clear homestead was pulled down and Glendale Crossing [*homestead*] was pulled down, but in the 1970s, Parks were only supposed to conserve natural values. But with the Cultural Heritage Conference, I think, the change of attitude started



and it became more apparent that we had to look after cultural heritage. Although the Mount Tennent homestead has not been very well looked after. It is said to be maintained as a ruin which makes it a bit difficult to maintain as a ruin. If you don't do something, it's just going to fall down. As a matter of fact, parts of it have already fallen down. The pisé wall on the out building has already fallen down through lack of support and maintenance.

We worked on the Boboyan pine forests after the fire. The first area in the pine forest, quite an extensive area, has been burnt out in the southern section of it. We worked on that, removing the feral pines that had come up within the old pine area as distinct from lately, when we have been removing feral pines in the native forest area. So we spent a few weekends there. It became too big a task and eventually the Parks Service experimented with poisoning areas of it. Also we weren't allowed to use chainsaws, and some pines had already grown too large for us. That area now has basically returned to normal.

MATTHEW:- How well attended were those pine work parties?

REG:- Oh, about 20 people, say. A photograph of a group of us has been featured in our 40th Anniversary Supplement.

MATTHEW:- And when was that work going on. Was that in the 1980s or 90s?

REG:- Yes, in the mid 1980s. Well, I imagine 4 or 5 years after the fire, when the pines had had a chance to regenerate and get going.

MATTHEW:- Another area of work that NPA was involved in was track work in the Budawangs?

REG:- Yes, Di Thompson organised work parties there. We had quite a few work parties in the Budawangs on the Wog-Wog section, between Wog-Wog and Mount Corang. The first part was cutting logs into cheeses and making stepping blocks over a particularly boggy area. I subsequently noted that the boggy area didn't seem to come back again after we put the blocks in. There was quite a large section there. Another section, a further area was quite a permanent bog in a gully but there was plenty of dead timber around and we cut these and corduroyed it. We also diverted the track around another section of it.

Then further out near Mount Corang the track was eroding badly. The Parks Service helicoptered a large number of logs in to put across the track, but unfortunately they were dropped not in the correct position and we had to sort of carry these logs, which were green and very, very heavy, 200 or 300 yards down to where they were needed. That was a very big task. Later on, around Mount Corang we did a lot of drainage work to try and divert water away from the track. Then further down near the Burrumbeet Brook, there were some walkways put in.

MATTHEW:- Like duck boards?

REG:- Yes, duck boards.

MATTHEW:- This was all about 1989 wasn't it?

REG:- Yes, sometime about that period.

MATTHEW:- Can you estimate for me what length of track the NPA members worked on in total?

REG:- Oh, it's a bit hard to sort of say. The total length is about two or three hours walk out to the end where we started. Earlier we were able to go into the Wog-Wog station and go up the track which saved about an hour or so walk, but later on that access was denied to us and we were carrying our gear right from the parking area on the road, the road to Nerriga. So it was quite a task to walk for a couple hours or three hours and then start work, and then have to walk back out again carrying picks and shovels and crow bars as well as your camping gear.

MATTHEW:- So you were camping in at the site of work?



REG:- Yes, when we were out there we camped.

MATTHEW:- *And would it be one weekend or would you stay a bit longer?*

REG:- No, it was only over weekends - weekend work.

MATTHEW:- *Can you remember how many people were involved, say at any one work party?*

REG:- Fifteen or something like that, of that order.

MATTHEW:- *And did it seem to members involved that it was a worthwhile project to be working on?*

REG:- Oh yes, I think so. I mean every little bit helps, I think. The track work ran around the side of the mountain before Mount Corang and even though we did this work it still gets very boggy, it requires surface hardening with metal [*gravel*] rather than just putting earth onto it.

MATTHEW:- *And what was the relationship like there? I mean, in that case you were working with NSW National Parks and Wildlife Service?*

REG:- Quite good. Yes, except the fellow forgot the keys one time and we couldn't get in but yes, it was quite. The problem is with the owners of the Wog-Wog station denying access because the road that goes in, technically it's not a public road, but in practical terms it should be. On the map there is a public road going in, but it goes in as a right-of-way in straight lines and the road that's been put in takes the natural route away from that line, so they are able to say you are on private property if you go in. There is a right-of-way going in from the main road and the NSW Parks Service never wants to take it up and make it a legal access.

MATTHEW:- *The Budawangs are, of course, outside the ACT and away from the NPA's home park of Namadgi but how do you feel about the Budawangs? Is that an important place to you personally?*

REG:- Oh, it's very important. It's a different sort of country to Namadgi for walking in: it's sandstone country and different types of views and so on. It's quite a popular place to go to. My first experience in the Budawangs was way back in about 1940, so it's quite nostalgic to go back there to some of the areas.

MATTHEW:- *And I guess the walking tracks weren't as well formed in 1940 as they are now?*

REG:- Particularly up Pigeon House. We had to climb up Pigeon House without the help of any ladders. I look up it now and wonder how we got about 20 people up on the top by scrambling up a chimney. Today when I look at it, I can't see how we did it, but I think probably then there were roots and bits of old trees or something in it, more hand holds than there would be today. Probably with all the people going up it, it has worn them all out. But to get 20 odd people up on the top without any accident and back down again, just looking at it now I don't know how we did it - a vertical place.

MATTHEW:- *Did you have any ropes?*

REG:- No, we didn't have rope in those days. I remember one trip up the Blue Mountains where we had some window cord, and a chap, it was only meant to steady him, put his full weight on it and fell backwards on his bum. That was the only rope I have ever known was carried.

MATTHEW:- *It's an interesting contrast between say Namadgi and the Budawangs, is the camping overhangs. I mean, in Namadgi there are rock overhangs but nobody uses them very much, but in the Budawangs it's quite common to camp in those sandstone caves?*

REG:- Yes. On one walk we had, we had wasted about an hour or more when it was raining trying to find an overhang because one chap hadn't brought a tent and wanted an overhang to sleep under. So after a while it became a fruitless search, and we finally went back to where we could



camp, and after a very long hard day we weren't too happy about it.

MATTHEW:- And in those earlier walks, like in the 1940s, did you ever see any signs of Aboriginal habitation like stone tools or anything like that?

REG:- I wasn't into stone tools then, but I remember the Aboriginal one there, on Quiltys [Mt]; the so-called Aboriginal arrangement on the top of the mountain there.

MATTHEW:- A stone arrangement?

REG:- Yes. I subsequently learned there may have been one there originally but a lot of it was done by Scouts in later years.

MATTHEW:- OK. Well coming back to...

REG:- The other job we worked on was the Tennent homestead. The garage there was in a state of falling down, and we straightened that up and put some weather proof wall board on the outside of it and cleaned it up. Also, work was done on the shearing shed, the flooring and [they] nailed all the loose bits to stop it falling down.

I wasn't on it, but also a temporary cover was put over the top of the pisé section, but it wasn't very satisfactory because it didn't last with the wind. A temporary plastic sheeting covering was put over on a rudimentary sort of frame.

MATTHEW:- On the pisé part?

REG:- Yes, on the pisé house, but it was totally unsatisfactory. It soon blew away but also, there had been no attempt to sort of support the pisé walls. Last time I was there, one wall had fallen down so I imagine that it won't be long before the rest probably. There has been no work done on the main homestead, the original homestead with the slab sections.

MATTHEW:- The slab section which doesn't have any slabs?

REG:- Yes. Other work parties have been on briars. That's been a continuing one. We worked on the Yankee Hat shelter track area and practically eliminated the briars on the eastern side of the river. On the western side there was a lot more of them but we made a very valiant attempt to get rid of most of them. There has been a contingent up in the Orroral Valley. We went from the Tracking Station down to the homestead and cleared all the briars out down there. We used to get larger work parties, but now it's not so popular and so the briar work party people aren't so happy about it.

Also, there has been feral pine clearing parties going along the fringes of the pine forests. Removing the feral pines. We had quite a big one, since the plantings have been going on in the Boboyan pines, on the western side and that has been an ongoing thing of getting rid of ferals which will be an ongoing, everlasting sort of job.

MATTHEW:- And with the briars, I guess, it's a bit of a thankless task in that the more you remove the more you start you see out there in the landscape?

REG:- Yes. You remove some and the further you remove you see more beyond you all the time. It is necessary to poison them. You can keep them back by stopping them seeding which is probably just cutting them to stop them seeding which at least stops further regeneration, but you still get some regrowth from it. Fiona [Brand] and I had a private patch near the start of the Boboyan Road which we kept clearing for years. Now the Parks Service has blocked the entrance off to it and so we have lost our incentive to go there.

MATTHEW:- That's at the beginning of the Old Boboyan Road?

REG:- Yes.

MATTHEW:- In this work, how was it carried out? Was it mainly just cutting with secateurs and



dabbing with Zero or something?

REG:- Yes. You'd work in pairs, it was best to work in pairs. One would wield the secateurs and the other one would do the dabbing as you went along. You were supposed to do it within 30 seconds or so before the sap dries out at the surface, so that you catch the sap running back into the trunk.

MATTHEW:- Can you form an estimate of how many individual briar bushes, say you and Fiona would deal with, in a day's work?

REG:- Oh, I don't know. We did have a count once but I've forgotten how many. I don't know, it's several hundred, probably 200 or 300 in a day.

MATTHEW:- Pretty stiff back at the end of it?

REG:- Yes. We have had rangers coming out working with us at times on the briars, particularly Joss. I would say, particularly Joss, I don't remember any others sort of helping with it.

In the Orroral Valley there's a heritage walk and it involved putting walkways down the valley over boggy parts. It was a very big job, some of them 100ft long and some only 20ft long or something or other. All the timber was dumped at the tracking station end and we had to carry it down to the site. I said, "Why can't you take it down in a lorry" and the ranger said, "We've got the fences" so I suggested, "Why not cut the fences. Just one panel out of the fence is not going to be any problem" and so finally a fence panel was cut out and assistance was given in carrying the timber down to the sites. The method of construction was against, sort of, making it a simple task. They wanted coach screw fastenings in each plank and that involved four screws in each plank which meant drilling three different size holes and then screwing them in. I pointed out to the ranger many times that this was a waste of effort. Finally we did some surveys. I was over in the States and Len Haskew was up at Kakadu and also we looked at other places, down at Jervis Bay and in the Botanic Gardens and so on, and everybody was just using galvanised spikes. So I kept on pressing this and finally the message got through, and they finished up spiking the planks. We could have done a lot more in a day than spending our time drilling the holes which required us to have electric power at the site to drill the holes, and a number of people involved standing by while holes were drilled and waiting. If it had all been hammer and spikes we could have done a heck of a lot more.

MATTHEW:- Before we finish with Orroral walkway, what length of track was NPA involved in building there?

REG:- Most of the way between, or two-thirds of the way between the tracking station and the Orroral homestead. That's the board walk part of it.

MATTHEW:- And that was put in to keep people out of the wet areas?

REG:- Yes. It was rather a thankless task having to do it the way we were forced to do it.

MATTHEW:- And that was in the 1990s?

REG:- Yes.

MATTHEW:- What about 1995?

REG:- I think about 1995 or something like that, 1996.

Deakin High; one of the teachers asked me whether I would lead some nature walks for them. They were going out for two nights, three days and I did a few of these up the valley from the Boboyan homestead and along the fire trail to the foot of Sentry Box Mountain and camp there. I would take them up Sentry Box Mountain and show them the features of that, the Sentry Box and then along the top to show them the Aboriginal stone arrangements there. Then come down the creek back to the camp so it was a triangular sort of walk. I did 4 or 5 of these. I also did



another one with another teacher up the Middle Creek Valley and over to Rendezvous Creek. At that time there was a court case of a girl suing a school because she had been damaged abseiling and had got some large amount of damages.

MATTHEW:- This wasn't Deakin High School?

REG:- No, this wasn't Deakin High School, it was another high school. So I wrote to the Headmaster and asked him what was my liability. Everybody was telling me the teachers have full responsibility, but I couldn't see it if it came to a court, the teachers were always out at the back and I was in the front leading them up these rocky parts and so on. They would pretty soon back off and say it was all my fault that I hassled them putting them where they were. I got a reply to say that the Department would give me no cover at all and suggested I get in touch with the Parents and Teachers Association. So I said, no thank you, I'm not going to worry about that any more and so I didn't lead any more walks. I feel the school lost something because the teachers didn't have any bushcraft and it was a unique circuit to take them on, the Boboyan homestead with its cultural heritage, the old shearing shed and then the natural parts of Sentry Box Mountain.

MATTHEW:- It is a question that seems to be arising more and more frequently for bushwalking groups, this question of public liability.

REG:- Yes. A lot of people won't lead walks because they think they might be sued by someone if something happens to them.

MATTHEW:- So, do you feel it's a sad development?

REG:- Everybody is worried about everybody else and not taking account of their only silly self. Not taking care or realising the risks they might be taking themselves and not blaming someone else for it.

MATTHEW:- So, in other words, the people who go on walks should take responsibility for themselves?

REG:- Well, they should do. Yes. That's the way it used to be. If anybody got hurt, there was never any thought of suing the leader for damages. There was a Sydney Bushwalkers case with a woman where the leader said to her, "Your shoes are unsuitable for coming on this walk" and she said, "Oh I'm all right" but unfortunately, he didn't insist she didn't come and she came on, got on a sloping rock and slipped and broke her ankle and that was going to be the end of it. But she had some solicitor friend and he said, "Oh you should sue them" and eventually there was some settlement out of court over it. So it is a risk.

MATTHEW:- So it was the Sydney Bushwalkers Club that had to pay the amount, not the individual leader?

REG:- Yes. Well it was an insurance company as they had an insurance cover.

MATTHEW:- But NPA has had no cases?

REG:- They've only got a public liability cover for the Association as a whole but how much it covers walking, I don't know.

I've worked quite a bit with KHA. I've worked on Brayshaws and Westermans and Goandra, Pretty Plain and Franks Hut. It's quite a rewarding job.

MATTHEW:- Yes, there has been quite a fruitful relationship between KHA and NPA, particularly in the past 15 years.

REG:- Yes. A lot of us, well I'd not say a lot, a number of us are joint members. I don't think the numbers are particularly high but a few of us enthusiasts are.



Yankee Hut walkways. The bridge was put in and...

MATTHEW:- By the Parks Service.

REG:- By the Parks Service. They had timber for walkways which lay there for months and months. We had a particularly wet season and we kept on asking when they were going to do something about it because you had to slosh through this and the water was up over the top of your shoes. Finally we took it in our own hands and got the timber and just laid it down without any fastening and got the message over. After that it was fixed up.

The Yankee Hat Carpark. Fiona Brand and I were out there one day and we were surprised to see that the Parks Service had made a new carpark on the top of the ridge, and diverted the track to do away with the other carpark. They ringed it with some 190 odd boulders about a metre in diameter and also cut down some live tree trunks to ring the area. We immediately brought it to the attention of our President who then brought it to the attention of the conservation groups of the ACT, and together we mounted a campaign against the Parks Service for this destruction of the environment.

We had a meeting with the Parks Service, and they agreed to restore the area to what it was. We had an inspection out on site and discussions. The Park workers weren't particularly happy with having been rushed to do this, and now to go and put it back again. With my work and industrial experience I could see problems, particularly if a committee went out to say we'd like a stone here or a stone there or another here and we don't want it there and so on, so I said, "There ought to be one person in charge of this" and they said, "What about you, Reg". So I fell for the job and spent about three days out there with the Parks Service workers, had quite a happy relationship with them and we planted all rocks back again. Some of them may not be exactly where they came from but, at least, when you look out there now you wouldn't know the difference. We've scooped the earth out a bit in some places and planted them. The place has been restored and also the area was gone over and levels restored with it. When you walk across it now you are not very conscious of what had been there.

They then wanted, because of the Yankee Hat shelter, to improve the old carpark. I was out there with the Parks Service and a couple of representatives of other organisations, and I suggested an arrangement where they could modify the old carpark, which was just people parking on the edge of the road, by making a loop into the pines which only involved cutting half a dozen pines down. My idea for the design of the carpark was accepted, so what you see there today is a memorial to me, I suppose.

We were out there with Joan Goodrum and she became quite interested in a lot of stones, piles of stones that she saw.

MATTHEW:- And she's a fellow NPA member?

REG:- Yes, a fellow NPA member. She thought they were Aboriginal stone arrangements. An Aboriginal friend of hers, Robin Bancroft, who came from the north coast, said that in her area these stones would have some significance to the Aboriginals of her area. So taking that line, we investigated and found many more of these, some of them were on the tops of rocks, some were alongside and some were in the earth. They were lines radiating out from rocks.

Fiona and I had fairly recently obtained a NSW Parks Service book on Aboriginal culture, a pamphlet, and two pages were devoted to Aboriginal burial practices. It had a photograph of a grave where stones had been piled on the top to prevent dingoes and other animals digging the body up. We happened to walk from the Gudgenby carpark and there we found a line of stones which exactly fitted this photograph. We brought it up to the Parks Service and for a while they accepted that it was a possible grave, but then their attitude towards it hardened and they reckoned it couldn't have been. At that time I thought I would try my divining skills which I hadn't



used for about 50 years (way back in the very early '50s I learned how to divine) and so I thought I would try divining some of these stone arrangement areas.

MATTHEW:- And so this is using pieces of metal to detect disturbances under the ground?

REG:- Yes, dug earth disturbances. So I dug a hole in my back yard and tested the ground before and after and found that it showed. I went round the Weetangera cemetery and had another try there and found some unmarked graves which I confirmed with Frank Southwell that they were unmarked graves.

MATTHEW:- He is a trustee?

REG:- A trustee of the cemetery. I then went to the public cemetery.

MATTHEW:- Gungahlin?

REG:- Gungahlin cemetery. They have lawn cemeteries there so I walked over the lawn cemeteries, and every grave I walked over showed that there had been earth disturbances. I then went to the church in Reid and asked if I could check on some unmarked graves. I was rather surprised when the lady there gave me one which was for Isabel Alder, which was a bit of a shock, my surname, but it was no relation. I went out with the vicar and found it where they said it was so I felt quite confident then of being able to divine earth disturbances.

The Parks Service then changed their attitude and wouldn't have it that they were graves. The proposition was put up that the stone piles were put there by people pulling stones out from rabbit burrows. It didn't seem possible that anybody removing stones from the base of a big rock would pile them very neatly the way they were, and also put them up on top. It was more likely they would hoist them over their shoulder. They brought in Granville Crawford, who had been on the Gudgenby property in the 1950s and recorded on tape all that he said. Later on, I managed with another friend I won't name, to have this tape transcribed and we found that on no occasion did he mention piling the stones as the Parks Service would have it.

MATTHEW:- So he said that he did not pile the stones on top of the boulders?

REG:- Well, he was asked a few times what he did with the stones but he never answered it on the tape. Everything he said on this occasion was recorded and then it was transcribed so we analysed it.

MATTHEW:- So he removed the stones to get rid of harbour for rabbits, but he didn't say where he had put the stones?

REG:- Where he had put the stones, or what he did with the stones.

There was another line of stones which was quite unique coming up from the Gudgenby River. On the opposite side of the river there is a rock which looks like a skull and this line of rocks lines up with it. They start off about a metre high and then gradually get lower and lower and lower for about 120 metres or so until they disappear into the ground. The consultants they had thought that it was a fence line or put there for a fence. We said it could never be a fence; what would you put a fence on stones like that. Granville Crawford was brought to look at it as he had said he thought it might not have been a fence, but as soon as he saw it he said he had never seen the stones before and he couldn't offer any explanation as to what they were there for. Certainly they were not for any purpose that he would have used them for.

Eventually a draft report was put in on these stone arrangements and we managed to get one which fell off the back of a truck. There were a lot of errors in it but we couldn't make any statement about it. Eventually the official final report was produced and we went through it and it hadn't been altered from the draft one. There were a large number of mistakes in it, and even a statement made by one person that it was a very good report. They didn't have the rivers correctly named, positions were way out by several hundred metres, illustrations were wrongly cap-



tioned and there were a large number of minor factual errors in it. I brought this up to the Parks Service and the next thing we knew another final report came out and the original final report was scrapped. But they still maintained in the report that these stones are rabbit arrangements.

MATTHEW:- Rabbit arrangements?

REG:- Yes, rabbit arrangements. One comment in the report said that because there's a piece of wood in one of the piles of stones, it couldn't have been there for a hundred years. This took no notice of the fact that the Orroral homestead has been standing for over a hundred years and the wood is still intact. Later on a stick was found up on the Brindabella Range which has now been authenticated as belonging to the Aboriginals as a digging stick. Well, if the bit of wood that was in one of these heaps of stones couldn't have lasted, I can't see how this other one up on the mountains could have lasted for a hundred years, so I just am wondering whether it really was a digging stick or whether there should be a change of heart as to what it was.

I had given to a person in the Australian Heritage Commission a number of photographs I took of natural stone shapes which could have some significance possibly to Aboriginals. I based this on photographs I had seen of the Mumbulla Mountain stone arrangements, and also other ones from Aboriginal texts up in New England and so on which showed various heads and various shapes which they said had some significance. This was accepted as being possible, but then later on when my idea of the Aboriginal arrangements came out, a letter was put out which said that I was only a bushwalker and I knew nothing about Aboriginal stone arrangements.

MATTHEW:- This is a letter sent to you?

REG:- No, it wasn't sent to me. It was sent as a result of the ACT Heritage Unit requesting confirmation or information about my claim, and this came back saying that because I was a bushwalker, what did I know about Aboriginal things and so on. Also the fact that I had given photographs, that I was silly to think that these could have been of Aboriginal significance, (when before they had been thought by this person that they were of significance) and my idea was just baseless. In other texts that I have, it says when you can't get Aboriginals to confirm something of significance, you can say that because there was something in that area it could be significant to this area but you can't confirm it. You can't confirm it but you can take it as being a strong possibility. Anyway I was denigrated quite a bit about that.

One thing I brought up with the NPA was grant money. We were getting grant money, and in one instance the grant money was going to be used for a book on Eden wood-chipping. I pointed out that the grant money was supplied for work in the ACT, but had quite a lot of opposition until finally they checked up and found that they couldn't use grant money for things outside the ACT and they had to find the money from elsewhere. So they got some money from the Commonwealth for it.

MATTHEW:- And that book on woodchips was duly completed?

REG:- Yes.

MATTHEW:- Quite a good report?

REG:- Yes, but there was quite a bit of opposition to me bringing that sort of thing up. Also, there was another instance where grant money was just being absorbed into the NPA's general accounts and I brought up that it had to be kept as separate and accounted for separately. I had a lot of opposition by the then treasurer who said that she was keeping very good accounts. Probably she was, but they weren't in the right headings.

Ginini Wetlands. It's been proposed to be put under RAMSAR. RAMSAR requires a management plan for the wetlands and consultants were employed to prepare a draft management plan. It's a bit of a long story but Fiona Brand and I joined a.....



MATTHEW:- ...a working party?

REG:- No, not a working party, a lecture, or whatever you might call it, on Ginini by the consultants one afternoon out at the Namadgi Visitor Centre. We then went out on a full day investigation with them to show what was involved. The draft management plan was put forward which involved closing the road from Mount Franklin to the Ginini carpark. Our Association agreed with that wholeheartedly, but I objected to it, got nowhere with them so I went and wrote to the consultants and the Parks Service pointing out various factors about how the closure of the road would actually bring more damage to the wetlands than leaving it open. Also that the bushwalking groups, particularly the NPA, didn't walk in that area anyhow. We had only had three walks in ten years, and although they went past the wetlands there were no walks walking over them. I learned subsequently that my submission resulted in the road being kept open so that was a bit of a win for everyone.

MATTHEW:- You mentioned at the beginning there that it was proposed as a RAMSAR site. It has actually been made a RAMSAR site.

REG:- Yes, that's right.

MATTHEW:- I think you were going to say a few words about your recent photo exhibition?

REG:- The Namadgi National Park is running a series of photo exhibitions and lectures at the Information Centre and I was given the honour of leading the field with my photographs, *60 years of photographing the Australian Alps*. It involved some 45 photographs on a new arrangement they had on the wall. It was officially opened by the [ACT] Minister and it was a very successful exhibition. I think somewhere around about 150 people attended the opening and it got good notices as far as feedback I got from people who have seen it. So that exhibition is continuing and will run until March [2000] or so.

Fiona Brand will be giving a lecture on the origins of the National Parks Association and its involvement in the declaration of Namadgi National Park because it's the 40th anniversary in March [2000] of the National Parks Association. I and five others have been working on a supplement to go into our *Bulletin*. It will involve some 44 pages and at this moment it has gone to the graphic designers and shortly will be printed. It will have a colour photograph cover which will feature Mt Namadgi and Mt Burbidge which are both significant to the Park and to the National Parks Association. In it are a number of articles from old *Bulletins*, some new articles and some 40 or 50 photographs of activities the NPA has been involved in. I feel it probably might become a bit of a collector's piece after a while so that will be well worth having in a few weeks time.

MATTHEW:- I'm sure many of us are looking forward to seeing it. Just going back, there was a very important seminar that the NPA ran, I think in 1985 of the cross border management of the Alps. Were you involved with that at all?

REG:- Yes, I was involved with it; I was involved with being projectionist at one stage. I well remember a fellow gave me his slides to project and he hadn't put them in the right way round and it was a bit of a bother then trying to get them sorted out. I wouldn't have thought this fellow, who was a so-called professional, would hand you a box of slides which he hadn't arranged. This Australian Alps Seminar was quite an important one. The NPA was a catalyst for it and had the job of organising it and quite a number of speakers. The result of it was that the Australian Alps coordinated a committee of the three organisations to sort of have a joint policy on its management.

MATTHEW:- ACT, NSW and Victoria?

REG:- ACT, NSW and Victoria, and that is still operating. They have a permanent liaison officer appointed from the different Parks Services running it and so it has been a successful thing.

One thing that has been going on for a long while is the Gudgenby homestead. Almost as far



back as I can remember, since the Park was declared, it's about what to do about Gudgenby. Originally the owner, Mr Boots, was left in residence. His land was acquired and he then had it on leasehold. Eventually it became too much for him to manage and he retired to Canberra. The leasing periods were shortened and it was run by his son-in-law and daughter, but eventually they vacated it and all the cattle were removed. That goes back to the late 1980s. There have been a number of investigations about what to do with the homestead and expensive reports produced. There was one large one in the early 1990s. Another one has just been done and there is still no decision on what to do with the homestead.

Most of us feel that it should be a centre for research where people could stay there. A large amount of research is done in the park by students from the ANU and Canberra University. The problem is, who's going to fund it as a centre so a decision is still to be made about what might be done with the 1960s homestead. It's now 40 odd years old and it has some cultural value, but there is some argument about whether there are other homesteads in other areas, outside the park, which could serve the same purpose. The Orroral homestead was in the same situation, someone wanted to pull it down, but now it's part of the scene.

MATTHEW:- Part of the cultural heritage?

REG:- Yes.

MATTHEW:- You mean the 1960s house?

REG:- Yes, the 1960s house. Also the original homestead is lying in some shipping containers waiting a decision where to re-erect it.

MATTHEW:- That's the original 1840s Gudgenby house. It can be re-erected sometime. Given the length of time you've been in the NPA, since the beginning of the 1970s, what sort of changes have you seen in the type of people who have been members of NPA?

REG:- Quite a bit of change, I think. People today have lots of other interests, TV, various sports, all sorts of things including people with families growing up, and it's been left increasingly to a smaller number of people to do the main tasks. At the moment we are having problems in getting a President which gives some indication. Also there's more demand now on producing very extensive reports on simple things and that involves a lot of time. I don't know whether it achieves any more, they're probably read, pigeon holed and nothing happens from them. I have just been reading one of the reports that NPA put a large amount of work into and which went to the government, but none of the recommendations have been accepted. That's commonplace. The same thing happened when the original management plan for Namadgi came out. We put in a large number of suggestions for improvements and when the final plan came out all they had done was correct some typographical errors and put in some suggestions of their own, but none of ours.

MATTHEW:- You did mention that when we met earlier in December. Although another NPA member has said that they felt that the NPA's points on the draft were well received and many of them incorporated into the final.

REG:- They weren't. I went through it word by word and they weren't. I went through it paragraph by paragraph and they weren't accepted. I felt rather taken aback by it. A lot of peoples' memory of that sort of thing may not be as good as mine. I went through our draft of the plan and the final one and highlighted all that had been done to it. It wasn't just a glance.

MATTHEW:- What sort of changes have there been to the walking side of the organisation, in the types of walks offered over the years? Have there been any changes and have there been any changes in the sort of people who go on the walks?

REG:- When I joined they only had monthly outings. They were more of an educational nature, you would go somewhere to look at some plants or see a geological feature or some other cultural thing, whatever it might be. That was the emphasis then. The walks were educational.



I had been used to sort of adventure type walks and so on, and with some others, in the early 1970s, we got together and started a walks program so we had weekly walks and exploratory outings. A lot of the things we did then were actually, as far as we were concerned, exploration because we had no-one to guide us. Now today, a lot of the walks that you might say we pioneered are classics and you follow a track now, a walking track, where people have been. This is mainly because of Outward Bound, Family Bushwalkers, Life Be in It and all those other people. I would say, we were real pioneers; actually we set the standard, I suppose, for the things now being done. There have been some big changes there.

Now there is a problem getting people to lead walks and there are more of the tougher, longer walks being put on rather than the easier ones and this, of course, excludes a lot of people who don't want to bash all day through the bush.

MATTHEW:- There are a number of easier walks or different types of outings in the current program. I don't think it's all hard walks for the tiger walkers.

REG:- Yes, but we are getting more longer ones, involving longer travel away, like they've got one up to Kosciuszko for a day walk. Well I mean, that to me, if you are going to Kosciuszko you want to stay there for more than a day and do a bit more than just rushing up there, spending five or six hours travelling and then five or six hours walking and rushing back home again. But that's the pattern of a lot of the clubs, bushwalking clubs now. They'll roar off and travel all night practically to get somewhere and do a walk, and come back again. Whereas the walks used to be more leisurely, but at least you gave yourself more time to enjoy them rather than sort of rush.

MATTHEW:- And another change that's occurred over the last couple of decades, of course, Reg, is the greater availability of guide books.

REG:- Yes, that's the other thing which is getting people on more walks, that people write up these classic walks. I've had people come on my walks, you know, taking notes which finally finished up in a book. Also, in the 1970s the 25,000 scale maps came out generally for everywhere, whereas prior to that you only had sketch maps for going somewhere. So now more people are able to sort of plan to a greater degree where they might go rather than before.

MATTHEW:- One question. I know we talked about the 1983 fire earlier but having been out to Mount Gudgenby myself this week I understand that you recall virtually all the eastern and northern side of that being just ash basically?

REG:- Yes, it was, absolute ash. Well, the fire came right down to Rendezvous Creek, the ridge between Rendezvous Creek and Middle Creek. It was just absolute bare earth, and the rocks had all split. Going up Gudgenby, at the foot of that big rock all the ash had sort of washed down with all the seeds from the eucalypts, and the eucalypts were coming up like grass. In later years they sorted themselves out a bit and made a great forest. I don't know if you found it yourself the other day or not, at the base.

MATTHEW:- A bit like bamboo?

REG:- Yes, a bit like bamboo and you could hardly push your way through it. They have probably separated out a bit now, I should imagine.

MATTHEW:- Slowly. And how soon after the fire could you see these seedlings germinate?

REG:- Oh, the next year. Yes, next year, it was in January as we had had heavy rains in November, when we did the Nursery Swamp regeneration, sowing grass and so on. We had sowed the grass, got some heavy rain and got very good generation. It probably happened then.

It was a bit of a hazard after the fire when the rains came. You walked across a creek gully and what looked like firm ground was a bed of ash that might have been a foot or two feet thick. You stepped into it and this sort of got on your socks and boots and so on, you didn't worry about it



much, but when it dried it was like flint. You would take your sock off, but you wouldn't want to put your sock back on again because it had set in a different position, you know, and it cut your ankles.

MATTHEW:- And were the streams discoloured for a long time with all this ash being washed into them?

REG:- Yes, there was quite a bit of erosion. You could see the erosion of the sand and the ash fill down in the gullies and so on. There was quite a bit of soil disturbance with it.

MATTHEW:- Now one thing we haven't covered in terms of work parties is the Yerrabi Track, and I know we talked about that in our KHA interview back in 1990, but on that occasion you didn't really say what your role was. So would you like to tell me now about the Yerrabi Track?

REG:- Our traditional route up the Boboyan Trig was to go up from Hospital Creek and make a round trip of it but Alastair Morrison and Hedda Morrison reconnoitred a route up from the Adaminaby Road which was quite short, only ?-km or so. So he took me out one day and I went up with him. At that time the NPA was leading Heritage Week walks and they were thrashing around in committee for a proposition for a walk and I suggested, "how about going up to the trig and show them the beauty of the park, because from the trig you can see practically the whole of the park and all the features of it". That was accepted and for about three years we led people up each year by putting plastic tape on the trees, and then at the end of the walk we took the tape down.

We then talked about making a permanent track and so we put the proposition up to the Parks Service, and in about three weeks or so, it might have been a month, it came back approved to consult with the park authorities. So we went out with two of the park people, Alastair Morrison and myself, and when we met them they obviously weren't talking to one another, there had been some argument about something which they never divulged to us. The pair of them hardly spoke to one another. We showed them the route and we got approval to carry it out.

So I gathered a group of people together, Charlie Hill, Bob Story and a few others and we set about it. I worked out a different route to what we had been doing on the Heritage Week to make it more direct and also take in more of the features. Also, we needed to get a parking area without any disturbance, cutting trees down. We found this on the road, took a compass course down to the swamp, then along the swamp and then another compass course up to the ridge to the trig. Obviously this was a straight line course and we couldn't follow it and so we diverted around logs and trees and zigzagged around. All we did was slightly disturb the leaves on the ground and mark the route with logs on the side of the track, by branches and things, whatever we could find.

So the route was defined, and we did all this in a couple of weeks. The only place we had to really disturb the trees, was a thick grove of wattles which had grown up after the fire going up the hill to the trig, and that was the only place where we actually cut anything down. Then having got up to the trig I, on a previous occasion, had walked down to the Hospital Creek hut and saw this great slab of rock below. We looked to see if there was an easy way to get down to it and found a route which was quite easy but involved putting a few steps in a bit of a cleft. We worked on that to bring people down to this big rock, because that's where you get the best view and a good place to picnic and so on.

I wasn't getting any support from the Parks Service. I could see what was going to happen. Every time we went out and did something, I came back and reported to the Information Office and said, "Have you been out and seen what we've done?" "No!" and we kept this up because I could see what might blow up. Then getting near the end, our own committee who weren't very much in favour - I think they put it up thinking it wouldn't be approved - and they hadn't been out, were making all sorts of arrangements.



I wanted an official sort of opening for it. They asked Ros Kelly whether she would do it, but she declined for some reason I don't know. I was speaking to Ian Warden about it, he was quite keen on the whole thing and I said, "How about proposing someone" and he said, "Oh I'll get John Langmore". I said, "Oh, wait a moment, I had better see the Committee first to see whether Langmore would be suitable because it's outside his electorate". So before I knew what had happened he had asked Langmore, so it was done. So Langmore came and Enfield, the Secretary of the Department came and, you know, 150-200 people turned up. You couldn't see the end of cars from one end to the other at the opening. It was an absolutely perfect day and so the Yerrabi Track was launched.

MATTHEW:- And that was 1987?

REG:- Yes, and it has been popular ever since. I used to go out and meet someone on the track but wouldn't let on who I was and asked them what they thought. They said, "Oh we've been out here several times and we bring all our friends" and so on. So it was quite enjoyable.

MATTHEW:- And the feature of it is the signs along the track indicating all the plant species?

REG:- I made all the signs along the track. I also produced the two pamphlets; one a guide pamphlet and one with the nature notes. I got people to write articles for it and designed the pamphlet and did quite a bit of work on it.

MATTHEW:- And the panoramic drawing?

REG:- I went up the top and took 12 photographs, 30° each angle and made a panorama up from that. Distorted the scale a bit to give more vertical rise to it and marked it all. I also marked Mt Burbidge on it which hadn't been ever recognised beforehand. So that was a bit cheeky, but there were never any objections to it. The Department didn't like the pamphlet for some reason or other and they decided afterwards to produce their own which had a lot less information on it. They didn't even bother to ask me for my original panoramic sketches, they copied them and in copying it wasn't quite as good and in transcribing them they didn't get quite the right shapes and things.

So that was a bit of a win, but afterwards I was rather upset. They had what we used to call a wash-up, our President and one of the Parks Service persons had a get together to see what better could be done in organising a job like that. I was rather annoyed about it because if anybody knew anything about it, I did and neither of these two individuals knew much about it. The President had never been on the work parties, and neither had this other chap come out from the time that the track was first planned, and I don't think he was on the opening day even. And then to talk about how best to plan a job! I had planned it meticulously and also did it much quicker than anybody could have done it because I was used to working as an overseer and planning work. So that was the story.

MATTHEW:- I guess the most important thing is that people go out there and enjoy the track?

REG:- Well, the greatest satisfaction to me eventually was the enjoyment people got out of walking the track, and the pleasant time that they had out at the end of it. So that's all forgotten now, almost anyhow.

MATTHEW:- Well just to finish off then, what do these last 30 years of involvement with NPA and Namadgi and that area mean to you?

REG:- It's been my life for the whole time, I suppose. I've been involved in all the main committee, sub-committees, editor of the *Bulletin* for six years and still getting involved. I keep on telling myself, I'm not going to do any more and I probably won't. I'm getting a bit jack of some of the decisions made by some of the people now that I don't quite agree with. I might be old fashioned, but I think I may be proved right or wrong in the future.



There's other things about it. I was granted Life Membership which was a great surprise to me. I was given no forewarning, and I was actually away when it was granted and no-one told me that I had been given it, so it sort of showed up the organisation at the time. Then some six weeks or so afterwards someone said, "Oh you were made a Life Member" and I said, "Was I? I didn't know". I never got any official notice - it was eventually written up in the *Bulletin*, but I never had any document to sort of say I had Life Membership. The Association didn't have a Life Membership file even.. even though someone said, "Who's got Life Membership?". Anyhow, when Syd Comfort was President I brought this up with him and he thought this ought to be remedied. He made a Life Membership file and sent letters out to people who had never had formal acknowledgment of it. So that's about it, I suppose.

MATTHEW:- OK, I think that we have both covered the points that we had in mind. Thanks very much, Reg.