



STATEMENT FROM ROSS CARLTON

(NPA President 1984-86)

I was born in 1938 and grew up in the western suburbs of Sydney. Our street was a dirt road with only a few houses and lots of bush, where I played as a child. My grandparents owned a dairy farm on the North Coast at which I spent many holidays, with much time roaming over the hills and through the bush. My grandfather was a major influence in fostering my interest in the bush and in birds in particular. Like most primary school children in those days, I was a member of the Gould League of Bird Lovers, but unlike most, I took it seriously and became a bird-watcher from an early age. In 1946 I was given a copy of Cayley's *What Bird is That* as a reward for good work at school, and nearly 60 years later it remains one of my treasured possessions. In the late 40s my parents bought a property in the sandstone country adjacent to Brisbane Water and holidays were spent there, camping, fishing and exploring the bush and rock pools.

In the 1950s I took up sailing and was at various times a member of the Concord-Ryde SC, the Abbotsford Flying Squadron and the Western Suburbs SC. For a time I was secretary of the latter club.

In the 1960s I was a member of the Wildlife Preservation Society and also joined the National Parks Association of NSW. With them I went on bushwalks in the Royal and Kuringai Chase National Parks and in the Blue Mountains. The NPA also introduced me to canoeing which has been an ongoing activity ever since.

My first association with environmental activism was in the campaign for a Myall Lakes National Park. Conservationists were alarmed by proposals for major sand mining in the area and launched what became what I think was the biggest and most vocal conservation battle up to that time. It was the first time I recall seeing bumper stickers used. I had fallen in love with the lakes following a canoe trip with NPA and a sailing/camping trip with the Western Suburbs Sailing Club. It was on that trip that I saw one of the other threats to the area. Every New Year weekend a regatta which turned into a drunken orgy was held at Mungo Brush with sailing and speedboat races on the Broadwater. It was attended by about 2000 people who camped in the bush with no provision for sanitation. NPA spearheaded a push, ultimately successful, to have the area proclaimed a National Park and as a result the lakes were saved from this sort of damage and also from the development which has surrounded most of the other coastal lake systems.

With the NSW NPA, I assisted in the preparation of a booklet called Sydney 2000 which outlined a vision for conservation activities in the Sydney area for the next 40 years. (There have, over the years been a number of publications with this title but this, I think, was the first.) I was chairman of a committee of the NPA which put together a submission for an addition to the Blue Mountains National Park, also ultimately successful.

While on an NPA walk to Blue Gum Forest in the Blue Mountains, I met Fiona Brand who had joined the outing while visiting her parents in Sydney. It was from Fiona that I learned of the existence of the NPA of the ACT. So, shortly after I moved to Canberra to live, I sought out the organisation and joined. My association with the NPA in Canberra was one of the most important and certainly the most rewarding of all my activities during the 15 years that I remained in the capital. I attended many day walks, bush camps and car camps, made some great friends and met a host of interesting people. Many members were from the CSIRO and I was especially impressed by the depth of knowledge displayed. People who became mentors and role models for me included Ian Currie, Charlie Hill, Bob Story and Reg Alder. I eventually graduated onto the committee and assisted in the preparation of a number of submissions to do with Kosciuszko and other areas. By this time I had had a fair amount of experience of committee work; in the sailing club, in my employment, the Institution of Engineers, the ACT Schools Authority and elsewhere,



but I found the NPA committee to be the most harmonious and enjoyable I had ever seen. Two very able secretaries that I recall were Sheila Kruse and Judy Payne. There were always two views of the association: some saw it as a conservation lobby group which also ran bushwalks while others saw it as a bushwalking and social club which also engaged in conservation activities. However, these two approaches were in general able to co-exist without much problem.

In 1983, the association faced a crisis when no-one could be found to take on the role of president. The situation was temporarily resolved when Ian Currie agreed to fill in for one year only. He had already served a lengthy term as president and understandably did not want the responsibility again on a continuing basis. In 1984, we faced the same problem again and I accepted the post, although very unsure of my fitness for it. I served for two years, the main achievements during that time being:

- setting up of a system of sub-committees which meant that about 40 members were actively involved in committee work
- opening of an office and employment of a part time person to man it
- declaration of Namadgi as a national park
- Conference on management of the alpine areas of NSW, ACT and Victoria.

The opening of an office and employment of a secretary was forced on us by the growth in the amount of work being undertaken, which overwhelmed the honorary secretary.

As for the declaration of Namadgi National Park, I can take no credit, as this was the culmination of a long campaign conducted by many people, going right back to the beginnings of the organisation. However, it was nice to have it happen on my watch.

The alpine conference resulted in a statement of co-operation by the three governments which was seen as a significant step forward. However, again I can take no credit as the work was done by others. I merely attended as president. Those who remember me probably associate me mainly with the project to restore the old Orroral Homestead, although, in fact, this was never my main focus. What happened was this. Back in 1981, a new system of community grants was introduced by the Department of the Capital Territory. They were looking for cooperative ventures with community organisations which they would then fund to carry out various projects. The NPA was not used to receiving money from government and our committee was unable to come up with a suitable suggestion. When I spoke to Pauline Evans, a ranger at the Gudgenby Nature Reserve about it, she suggested the old homestead and took me to see it. This was a building dating from the 1860s which was just beginning a slow collapse and which was currently being camped in by sheep. I put the proposal to the NPA and it was accepted although there was a minority view that our business was natural not cultural heritage. When our submission went in to the Department they jumped at it, claiming it was exactly the kind of project they were looking for. They would provide the money and we would contribute the labour for the restoration work.

Denise Robin did a great job in researching the history of the building, the Department fenced it off from the sheep and I organised working bees to clear the surrounding ground of weed growth and clean out the sheep droppings. We also salvaged such items as door locks (one with a plate indicating that it was manufactured during the reign of William IV) and sent them to the Canberra College of Advanced Education (now the University of Canberra) where they were repaired and restored by students in a conservation course. However, our working bees were observed by a member of the Archaeological Society which lodged a complaint with the Department, describing our enthusiastic volunteers as "barbarians".

A hold was put on the work and we were awarded an additional unsought grant to cover the cost of an archaeological survey. We assisted the archaeologist in digging around the site (in the snow on one occasion) and a report was produced (at \$100 per page), but nothing of significance found.

By now, word of the project had spread and the Department was lobbied by various interest



groups. More money was forthcoming for an architectural survey and report and later for a planning study for the whole of the Orroral Valley, including the, by now defunct, tracking station. The upshot of all this was that NPA found itself in receipt of large amounts of grant money but unable to get on with the work. As the originator of the project, I had the job of liaising with the Department and reporting back to the association at each meeting. It was to be 10 years from the project's instigation and long after I had left Canberra, before the bureaucracy finally allowed the restoration work to be carried out.

In addition to my NPA activities, I was a member of the Canberra Ornithologists Group and for a time, Chairman of the ACT Heritage Week Committee. However, the NPA remained my main interest and I have many fond memories of people, meetings, outings and conservation work. I wish the association well for many years into the future and hope it can maintain its two-pronged approach: fellowship and conservation activism.

Ross Carlton