

SAVE COLONG bulletin

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HELP SAVE THE BOYD PLATEAU NATIVE FOREST

Having won its fight over the limestone mining at Mt. Armour in 1973 after a six year battle against the world's largest cement company, The Colong Committee is now engaged in another fight. This time it is to save the native eucalypt forest on the Boyd Plateau from destruction by the Forestry Department who covet it for a pine plantation. This area is a "hole in the heart" of the Kanangra-Boyd National Park and must be incorporated in it.

The Colong Committee is not opposed to pine planting as such but it does strongly oppose Forestry Commission methods. The Commission has officially stated that in the Oberon Forest District, 44,000 acres have been planted with pine and a further 60,000 acres are available. Why then this indecent haste to bulldoze the 16,500 acres on the Boyd Plateau?

Immediately south of Jenolan Caves, the Boyd Plateau, with an average altitude of over 4,000 feet, contains 33,000 acres of natural bushland. Parts of the Plateau were covered by reserves which had been progressively dedicated since 1891. The largest of these, Reserve No. 67062 for the preservation of Native Flora & Fauna was gazetted in 1937 over the southern and eastern portions as well as much more off the Plateau. It was expected that, with the creation of the Kanangra-Boyd National Park in 1969, these Reserves would be given National Park status. Instead, following an inter-departmental meeting, the Forestry Commission was allowed to expand into the area from the small 9,700 acre Konangaroo State Forest No. 750 which was dedicated in 1921. The Boyd Plateau is logically an integral part of Kanangra-Boyd National Park, and indeed is almost surrounded by parkland. The Plateau is the source of the streams flowing into the Kanangra & Kowmung river systems which are the heart of this unique wilderness area.

On the eve of the Parliamentary enactment of Kanangra-Boyd National Park came the stunning announcement that a large part of the Boyd Plateau was not to be included within the Park. The Forestry Commission claim for a pine plantation had won the day. The forest would be logged, the native vegetation razed and 16,500 acres planted with *pinus radiata*.

During the ensuing Parliamentary debate on the National Parks and Wildlife (Amendment) Bill of 1969 the future of the Boyd Plateau was discussed at length together with the Colong Caves Reserve. Several Government M.L.A.'s expressed the hope that alternative areas could be found for pine plantations. The Independent Member for the Blue Mountains, Mr. Coates, who knows the area intimately said "It is my opinion that a substantial area of land is available without the need to plant pines on the Boyd Plateau. The area is in my view part of the Kanangra Walls system, one of the most beautiful spots in N.S.W."

It was the early bushwalkers of the National Parks and Primitive Areas Council who, in 1932, inspired by a wonderful vision, first submitted to the Government a proposal for a Greater Blue Mountains National Park. The Boyd Plateau was part of that grand scheme. The gazettal, five years later, of Reserve No. 67062 showed that even in those early days of environmental concern, the Government agreed that the area should be preserved as part of our heritage for all to enjoy. In the interim, parts of the Reserve were severely logged with the approval of the Forestry Commission. The Under-Secretary of the so-called Conservation Department admitted in a letter to the National Parks Association in May 1967 that the Forestry Commission had "overlooked the fact that the particular area was part of Reserve No. 67062"

On 23rd January, 1974, our Chairman (Jim Somerville) led a deputation from The Colong Committee to the Minister for Conservation, the Hon. George Freudenstein. The Minister advised us that the Forestry Commission would submit its environment impact study on the destruction of the native forests of Boyd Plateau to State Cabinet the following Tuesday.

Prior to the Cabinet meeting, the Premier and Mr. Freudenstein received telegrams from:

- Nature Conservation Council of N.S.W.
- National Parks Association of N.S.W.
- N.S.W. Chapter, Royal Australian Institute of Architects.

The Conservation Council wired as follows:—

"Inclusion of Konangaroo State Forest is vital to Kanangra-Boyd National Park stop
Any proposed forestry activity should be subject to public inquiry "Willan, Chairman
Nature Conservation Council of NSW."

Cabinet apparently rejected these representations against the destruction of this sub-alpine forest, the head catchment of the State's most important wilderness area, and the matter was referred to the State Pollution Control Commission for decision in camera.

For almost a year the Forestry Commission, at the Minister's direction, refused to make its environment impact study public but it has now been obtained. The fact that the study contains six pages of criticism of the A.C.F. and the Colong Committee, puts the study's objectivity seriously in question.

A member of the Colong Committee was invited to peruse the Commission's cost/benefit analysis in its office and it was then revealed that the economic case for planting pines is based on the Crown land which they intend to plant having no value. We are shocked that in this day and age a statutory authority still believes that wilderness has no value, and this despite the decision of Mr. Justice Hope that it *does* have a value. On this extremely doubtful basis, the Forestry Commission economists have determined that to relinquish its claim to the Boyd would cost \$70,000 per annum! Their credibility in this field is certainly open to question and we are taking steps to call expert evidence on the validity of their examination of alternative areas from an economic viewpoint.

NATIONAL TRUST INVOLVEMENT

The Forestry Commission hosted an inspection tour of the Plateau in March last year for members of the Conservation and Landscape Committee of the National Trust, hoping to persuade this prestigious body of the validity of its claim. The Commission failed however and the Trust bluntly asked the Minister when the plateau was to be added to the park, giving as some of its reasons for this decision:—

- (a) The Boyd Plateau, being of special interest because of its location, climate, elevation, topography and geology, and the resulting flora and fauna, should be retained as a complete entity.
- (b) Since it is a significant part of the catchment for streams flowing through the park, is visible from much of the park and provides wildlife habitat not otherwise well represented in this or other parks, the whole plateau should be managed as part of the Kanangra-Boyd National Park.
- (c) The plateau is ideally suited for recreation and camping and is easily accessible from major population centres, particularly the proposed new Bathurst/Orange growth centre.

In a letter to the Minister for Conservation, the Hon. G.F. Freudenstein, the Trust stated its policy on the Boyd and requested

".... that no further logging of native timber be permitted in the Konangaroo State Forest pending discussions on transfer of the land to the National Parks and Wildlife Service."

The February 1974 "News Letter" of the National Trust of Australia (NSW) supported retention of the natural forest of the Boyd Plateau following a survey of Bathurst/Orange development. The Conservation and Landscape Committee of the Trust has carried out a study of the Region identifying landscape, conservation or recreational value assuming a projected urban regional population in excess of a quarter million by the turn of the century.

"The amount of uncleared unalienated land within the region is already quite limited due to the extent of agricultural development and only a thin sliver of Kanangra-Boyd National Park plus four nature reserves currently exist."

"The Committee has proposed four new National Parks, each of relatively small size but nonetheless of considerable regional importance; a large number of new nature reserves are proposed."

"The study repeats the Trust's opposition to pine plantation on the Boyd Plateau and urges retention of certain State Forests still remaining under natural cover."

A special committee of State Council of the Liberal Party resolved that the bulk of the Boyd Plateau should remain under native forest. Since then resolutions of State Council of the Liberal Party have called for the use of redundant cleared agricultural and grazing lands for pine plantations and the preservation of our scarce remaining eucalypt forests.

The truth is that the protests and representations of three years ago were so effective that the Forestry Commission was obliged to shelve its Boyd pine plantation project. The Commission, at the behest of its Minister who believes that opposition has died away, is again attempting to win approval of its project. Mr. Freudenstein has indicated that bulldozing could commence almost immediately if approval is given by the S.P.C.C.

"FIGHT FOR THE FORESTS"

V. & R. Routley have recently published a book entitled "Fight for the Forests" in which they point out that Australia's forest areas are seriously under-represented in National Parks and this despite the fact that National Parks established on Crown land involve no serious expense. As little capital is involved, opportunity costs with respect to capital expenditure are also extremely small. On the other hand, quoting actual financial data from four States, Routleys show that

Forest Service deficits have been growing since 1950 and now exceed \$30 million in Australia. Since large capital expenditures are involved there is not only the direct loss to consider but also the substantial opportunity costs involved in the heavy capital outlays and indirect costs such as the Forestry & Timber Bureau, branches of CSIRO, etc. which are all maintained at public expense.

The Routleys demonstrate that a strong economic case exists for the allocation of unalienated Crown land to national park rather than forestry usage, so that there is no barrier to the creation of a park system with a generous allowance of forest land. Forest has great appeal to many people because it is diverse, has a large range of fauna and is frequently (like the Boyd Plateau), situated in spectacular wilderness country close to the heaviest population concentrations.

It has been suggested that the Australian Government should be prepared to buy suitable alienated land in private hands in the Oberon District for the NSW Forestry Commission so that the Boyd could be added to the Kanangra-Boyd National Park. The Colong Committee strongly supports this proposal as a sensible solution to the dilemma.

WE NEED YOUR SUPPORT!

It is clear from the foregoing that the campaign to save the natural forest of the Boyd Plateau is now rapidly heating up after a year of bureaucratic inaction. Possibly Mr. Freudenstein believes with other members of the Liberal Party that the steam has gone out of the Conservation movement in N.S.W. If so then he is due for a very rude awakening!

The ball is now in the court of Hon. Sir John Fuller whose State Pollution Control Commission is to decide the issue. The Chairman of the Commission (Mr. Coffey) believes that the issue should be decided by the twelve members in camera but we believe a public hearing is essential if justice is to be done on such a controversial issue.

The issue is simply whether the Boyd should be stripped of its native forest and planted with exotic pinus radiata or preserved and incorporated into the National Park which bears its name.

A demonstration by about fifty supporters was held outside Parliament House on 20 February and was successful in bringing our problem to the attention of the media and the Members themselves as the result of a question asked of the Minister by K. Rozzoli, M.L.A. Many more demonstrations are planned and 180 Conservation organisations in NSW have been asked for their support. The Hon. George Freudenstein and Cabinet will soon appreciate that they have a major controversy on their hands.

DONATIONS: Donations would be appreciated. Please forward to:—

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