

# **SAVE COLONG** **bulletin**

**THE COLONG COMMITTEE • A National Wilderness Society**

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## **VISIT TO KAKADU BY MEMBERS OF COLONG COMMITTEE**

The belief of most Australians that the Northern Territory is a vast, undeveloped wilderness is a myth which has persisted for far too long. Perhaps this explains the otherwise inexplicable reluctance of Canberra based politicians and bureaucrats to dedicate even one National Park in the Northern part of this vast Territory. Apart from the land reserved for the exclusive use of the original inhabitants, there are only three large wild-life reserves and one proposal for a National Park, all the remaining land is taken up by pastoralists.

In 1965, the Northern Territory Reserves Board, the competent authority, proposed a National Park of world heritage class, embracing the land between the South and East Alligator Rivers which included considerable wetland, and the scenic escarpment of Arnhem Land (along which is the best collection of Aboriginal paintings in Australia.)

After eleven years of whittling, during which the Park was twice approved in principle by the responsible Federal Minister, the area proposed is now less than half the original and about the same size as our Kosciuszko National Park. In 1969 the two huge pastoral stations of MUNMARLARY and MUDGINBERRI, which contains most of the wetland, were converted from leasehold to freehold, and the boundaries were subsequently re-drawn to exclude each new uranium find, until only two now lie within the proposed Park.

The scenery and wild-life is still much the same as when the white man first arrived. Vast flocks of many species of duck, magpie, geese, and cockatoos inhabit the many beautiful lagoons and billagongs. Dingoes howl in the evening, wallabies bound away, and reptiles, including crocodiles, are evident everywhere.

The Colong Committee has turned its attention to the need to set aside an area within the Northern Territory, free of all development. An extended inspection by five of its members has high-lighted the depredations caused by wild buffalo and pig, and the policy of regular burning. The area is in double jeopardy as government funds for the shooting of the vast herds of buffalo are being reduced as an economy measure, but burning continues unabated. Ironically, although the party's official permit stipulates that "the lighting of fires other than for cooking is not permitted", a plane chartered by the same Department dropped incendiaries nearby, and one of the resulting fires, racing through the tall, dead grass, missed us by a hundred metres. As no property is in need of protection, one could be pardoned for thinking that this official vandalism was intended to provide green feed for the buffalo which it is the Department's stated policy to reduce!

Immediate action is required to proclaim an Arnhem Land National Park, even with mutilated boundaries, together with a realistic Management Plan which cancels prospecting licences, and is designed to preserve and not degrade the natural values of this scenic wilderness. The Government can hardly expect the public to accept the remnant of a Park with its boundaries determined by pastoral and mining interests.

## **BORDER RANGES MORATORIUM AND INQUIRY PROPOSED**

The Australian Conservation Foundation has called for a five year moratorium and a full public inquiry on logging, land use, and environmental problems in the Wiangarie and Roseberry State Forests of N.S.W.

The A.C.F. Director, Dr. Geoff Mosley said the inquiry should be set up by the N.S.W. Planning and Environment Commission and should examine the main options of either a National Park or continuation of present logging programmes.

"The enquiry should also look at the possibilities of reafforestation of abandoned farmlands on the lower slopes of the ranges which might be able to replace the native forests as a source of wood supply," he said.

"This would create extra opportunities for recreation, both taking pressures off the nationally important virgin rainforest, and also creating alternative employment opportunities for dairy farmers and timber workers."

Dr. Mosley added: "The Border Ranges have reached the cross-roads. If decisions are not taken now, the chances for a world-class twin-State National Park, incorporating virgin rainforests in Queensland's existing Lamington National Park, and the new National Park on the N.S.W. side, will be lost forever."

## VISITING THE MINISTER'S ADVISOR

She was young, and had only belonged to the conservation society a few months.

"I'm going to see Dr. Softly," she said one night, at a meeting.

The old hands just grunted. "The advisor to the Minister for Lands and Environment? You'll get nowhere with him. He's a Forestry Man."

"But, if he visited the rainforest, if he could just see it, it would be saved."

"He's already seen it plenty of times," they replied. She could not believe that anyone who had seen the rainforest, could sanction its logging. She thought it must have been a mistake, that conservationists were pessimists by choice, that they wanted to be opposing, and on opposite sides, and rejoicing in bureaucratic arguments.

Because, if you went into the forest, you were changed. The trees were so much alive you could hear them thinking. Raindrops hurtled down from tiny leaves far, far above, shining green from a hidden sun. There were birds that did not fear guns, and had not known machinery. Sometimes a wallaby bounded across your path over the layer of leaf-mould. There were ferns and palms. Indoor displays, with decorators labouring months to create them could never be equal. Stag horns, elk horns, and birds nests hung in clumps from branches. It was all magic, and quite sacred, from fairy stories, mysteries and myths. You could hardly talk there, it was so deep and solemn. She knew, if the Minister could just stand where surveyor's pegs had been hammered, then he would revoke immediately all permission for tractors and chain saws to savage the greenery.

The day for her appointment came, and she met Dr. Softly. You could tell he wanted to be polite. He had thin eyes.

They went into his office, and sat down at a table. "Well," he said, "And what can I do for you," taking out a pad and pen.

"We want you to visit the rainforest with the Minister," she said.

He laughed, "I've seen it hundreds of times," he said, as though it was no more important standing in rainforests than crossing roads. "It's not unique, you know. There's lots of rainforests in N.S.W. You conservationists want to get your facts right. You see, this is your first problem, you're dealing with experts. I've been a forester all my life. I've got degrees. What are your qualifications?"

She said, "I have none." She did not see the qualifications were important. She asked if the Minister had seen the forest.

"Give him time," Dr. Softly replied. "Anyway, it's not his Department. It's the Minister for Conservation. He wouldn't encroach on another person's territory."

"Then, would the Minister for Conservation go up with him, do you think?"

"He's just new to the ministry. He has to learn what it's all about first. Why some of these fellows don't even know how to open mail yet." You could tell, he thought she was dumb enough to be familiar with.

"We know our facts," he continued. "We're experts. And the fact is, the rainforest has been logged for years. You conservationists want to save it. But it's already been logged. Did you know that? That's what annoys me. The way you call it destruction. It's not destruction. The forest grows back."

"It doesn't ever come back, it seems," she said. "I've seen places where trees were felled seventy years ago. And there's still just weeds, just lantana and stinging bushes."

"Look," he said, "Do you know about botany? Have you studied ecology? I've studied these things all my life, and taught them too." He began to draw diagrams on his pad. He explained at length how seeds germinated. But he did not ever explain how forest grew again the same as it was before. He made it sound ordinary, as though you could say, "seed grow!" as though he commanded seeds, and trees to come, and they came.

"You know who logged those trees seventy years ago?" he demanded. "That was John Lever. The conservationists go making him a hero, well he was the one that logged them all. The reason he wants the logging to stop now, the reason he's on the conservationist's side is because he's just jealous of other sawmilling companies. These conservationists just seize on anything."

It was all wrong, and confronting. She wondered if there was any place where Dr. Softly was tender and not closed.

"I think it would be a pity if the groups polarised," she said. "I think conservationists and ministers need each other. Ultimately, I suppose, it's just a matter of a beautiful forest. All words mean nothing."

"But this is a democracy," he said. "A democracy can't afford the luxury of indulging a small minority group. You want the place left as a wilderness? Well, who's going to ever see it then?"

"It's something long-term, it's not for the present. But there could be boarding houses on the edge of the forest, and you could go on guided walks. The tourist potential's enormous."

"You can still do that if we're logging it. We've been logging it for years."

"But when it's logged, it's different. It's not the same. It's untidy, and a mess, and just weeds. We're a rich country. We can afford conservation."

"You're getting your terms muddled. You mean preservation, I think. You want to know what you're talking about."

She did not mind what word meant what. It was nothing to do with words. It was trees.

"What about Blue Poles, and the Opera House. They could afford those for minority groups. And this is alive, not dead."

"Don't get me wrong. I'm a culture man too," he said. "I like my art, and my opera. But the Opera House is used by everyone you know, not just a few."

He went on saying more things, and more explaining. But she could not hear them; she could not listen.

They discussed the people who would be out of work if the logging ceased.

"We're studying methods which could re-employ them," she said. "In Canada they spend millions on National Parks. You know; live the life of an Iroquois Indian, sleep in his tee-pee, eat his food. People love it."

"I know what's going on in the States," he said. "I've just returned from six weeks there. It's cheaper to have a package deal to America, than a holiday here."

She stared at him. "It seems they have more National Parks there," she said.

"They were lucky enough to have more forests in the beginning," he replied.

She said, "All words mean nothing. It's just cutting trees down. It seems wrong to be cutting them down."

He answered, "Trees die in the end anyway."

She thought, you did not shoot people, because they would die of old age.

"Do you belong to an environmental committee?" he asked.

"The Colong Committee," she answered. "I'm a writer."

"What are you going to write about me?" he asked.

Until then, she has not considered writing about him.

"You know, one of those conservationists accused me of being a Forestry Commission man," he said.

"But I left the Forestry Commission six years ago."

If only you could have talked to him like you talk to anyone you meet at parties, but he made it all be opposing, and opposite sides.

"What's the Colong Committee's next move?" he asked, as though it was wars, and strategies, and not the same country, owned and shared by the same people.

"They are going to study the employment situation," she said, thinking that it should be governments that studied it, not private citizens.

"Well they'll need to know their facts," he said. "There's a whole department in Canberra working on unemployment, you know."

She laughed.

She had a dagger-orchid from the rainforest in a glass jar. Its green leaves shone in the steam and moss of the bottle.

"This is a present for the Minister," she said.

He laughed. "You could give it to him personally if he wasn't in Cabinet," he said. They gave the orchid to the Minister's secretary. It sat there, in a bottle, an extract of real rainforest, among the papers and pens of bureaucracy. But it was only leaves to them.

The Advisor showed her to the lift. He had at all times been courteous and attentive. She could not have accused him of rudeness.

Her only mistake had been that she had believed to win you only had to be in the right.

#### RECOMMENDATIONS OF THE A.L.P. N.S.W. ENVIRONMENT COMMITTEE

There can be no doubt that the objectives of the Colong Committee have been very sympathetically received by the A.L.P. organisation. In a detailed report presented to the 1976 State Conference by the Environment Committee, many of the Colong Committee's recommendations have been adopted.

On Bungonia, the Environment Committee recommends rationalisation of mining so as to minimise the need to approach the edge of the plateau, the restriction of spillage to the plateau, restoration of reserves which were revoked to allow mining, the creation of additional reserves to protect Bungonia and Barbers Creeks and the addition of these reserves to Morton National Park.

On mining the report states that "The pre-eminence of mining as a form of land use is no longer justified either on rational grounds of resource use and management or even economic grounds." All mining should be excluded from areas where the natural ecosystem should be preserved as a sample and the land reserved and administered by the N.P. and W.L.S. The power of the Minister for Mines to grant exploration licenses in National Parks should be abolished. Individuals should have the right to object to the issue of all forms of mining authorities, and applicants for mining authorities should be required to submit an E.I.S.

On Forestry, the Act should be reviewed to require management on restrained yield and multiple use lines. Substantial areas of State Forest should be preserved as National Parks. The Softwood Forestry Agreement should not be renewed and no further major softwood projects involving the clearance of large areas of native forests should be commenced. Any future softwood plantations should be on previously cleared land. The Industries Assistance Commission should inquire into forest revenues to determine the amount of assistance to forestry.

On Myall Lakes the report calls on the Australian Government to revoke the export license of Mineral Deposits Ltd. and on the State Labor Government to immediately revoke the mining lease over the high dunes beside Smith's Lake.

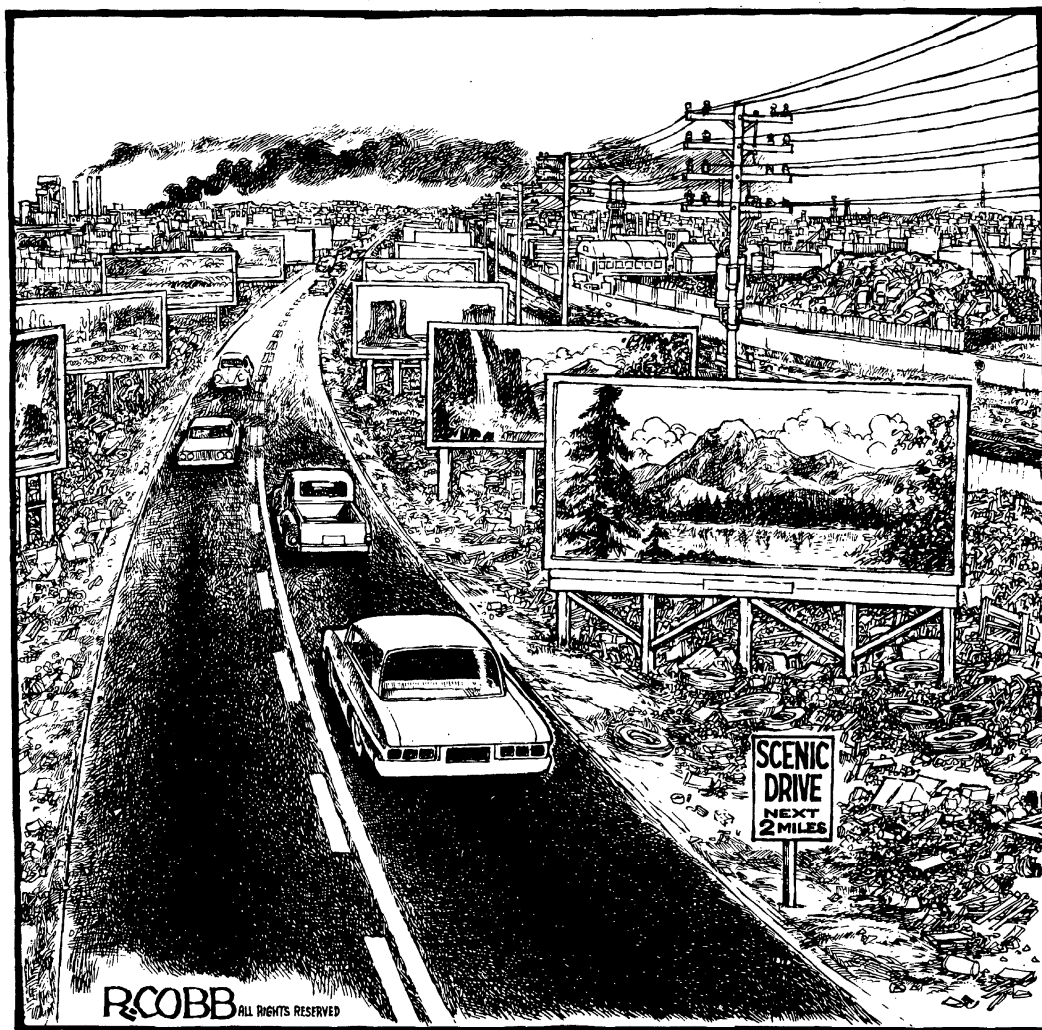
The Committee's Land Use Planning recommendations would effectively destroy the Forestry Commission's monopolisation of the allocation of forested Crown Lands. A Land Conservation Council should be established with special attention directed to preservation of natural areas and the creation of national parks, forests and areas for leisure. Draft reports of the Council should be subject to public scrutiny.

For woodchipping on the North Coast, the only approved source of material is sawmill waste.

On the Border Ranges, the Environment Committee is 100% behind the Colong Committee and it is recommended that Wiangarie, Roseberry and Mount Lindesay State Forests become a border Ranges National Park. No approval should be given for the construction of the road into Levers Plateau. Alternate supplies for the Timber industry should be provided by the purchase of cleared land for Hoop Pine plantations.

The recommendations of the Environment Committee were not accepted in their entirety by the Conference. Recommendations on the Border Ranges were narrowly defeated after acrimonious debate, because of the fear of the Timber Workers Union and the Labor Council that unemployment would be created if Wiangarie were not logged, but a full inquiry on employment in the area was approved. Forest residues from forests under the supervision of the Forestry Commission were added to approved woodchipping materials.

It is extremely gratifying to the Colong Committee to find such acceptance of the causes for which it has been working. Now that the A.L.P. is in Government in N.S.W. it has the opportunity to give effect to the policies recommended by its Environment Committee, most of which do not involve financial outlay, many being purely legislative and administrative changes. Several of them would, in fact, result in reduced Government expenditure. Non-renewal of the Softwood Forestry Agreement would reduce commitments by millions of dollars of both Commonwealth and State funds. Some, if not all, of this money could be devoted to the acquisition and re-forestation of unprofitable cleared lands. A re-forestation programme in the Kyogle district, on the scale of the present pine plantation programme, would absorb all the workers now engaged in the destruction of the Border Ranges rainforests.



FROM "THE COBB BOOK" (WILD & WOOLLEY, SYDNEY, \$4.95)

**GROWING AUSTRALIAN NATIVE PLANTS**

To discuss and encourage the growth of native plants various conferences will be held in places such as the Warrumbungles, New England National Park and Macquarie Marshes at various times from August this year, to April next year.

Nine formal areas of study will be supplemented through group discussions, and there will also be practical sessions. The cost will vary from \$15 for a weekend, to \$40 for a five day school.

Anybody interested can contact UNE Continuing Education, P.O. Box 591, Tamworth, 2340. An early enrolment is advised as numbers are limited.

**BEQUESTS**

The history of the Colong Committee was traced in the last issue of the Bulletin. It is now over 8 years since it was formed for the one purpose of saving Colong Caves. In a short time it expanded its objectives to include the Boyd, and in 1972 became a national wilderness society. In 1973 it became a non-profit making limited company. Its incorporation as a body corporate means that it is now an enduring association which will continue irrespective of what may happen to its individual members.

By sales of the "Bulletin" and of Border Ranges posters, from the proceeds of APCM single shares, and the generosity of our supporters, we have enough funds in hand for present purposes, and believe we can carry on indefinitely at the present level of activity. All the work of the Committee is being done on a voluntary basis except for occasional professional services, e.g. photography. We have a wide range of expertise, available to us, free of charge.

We know there are many sympathisers who have insufficient time, or perhaps present means, to help. Many of these sympathisers have derived a great deal of their enjoyment of life from the wilderness areas we seek to preserve. To these we suggest that thought be given to making a bequest to The Colong Committee Ltd. If sufficient, this would enable the Committee to employ a part or full time executive secretary, as have the Nature Conservation Council, the A.C.F. and the N.P.A. Committee members could then give more time to front line activities such as research, submissions and publicity. It would also ensure continuous attention to our campaigns, which often require instant reaction to the moves of those who oppose us, or immediate help to our supporters. So, if you have the means, and would like to achieve a modicum of immortality, give some thought to a bequest.

**CORRECTION**

In the last issue of the Bulletin we said that Alex Colley, the Honorary Secretary, has been in the past involved in Food Use Analysis. This should have read "Land Use Analysis."

**CARRICK LTD. SHARES**

Our plan for achieving a voice and an insight into Carrick's affairs has not gone quite as we expected. A number of our subscribers (and a good many others) asked to be allotted single shares, as we had suggested in a previous Bulletin. Unfortunately, Carricks have refused to transfer single shares, quoting an amendment to their Article of Association (39A) passed at their last Annual General Meeting, under which they may decline to transfer a parcel of less than twenty shares.

For the moment we are holding the cheques and cash received, and subscribers will receive or have received a letter from us explaining what has happened, and offering:—

- 1) to accept an additional sum to bring their payment to \$30, for purchase of twenty shares  
or
- 2) If they so request, to have their money returned  
or
- 3) If we have not heard from them by the end of August, to accept the money as a donation to our Border Ranges campaign and a year's subscription to the Colong Bulletin.

The Secretary  
The Colong Committee Ltd.  
18 Argyle Street  
SYDNEY. 2000

Dear Sir,

I enclose \$2.00 being my subscription to the Save Colong Bulletin for the remainder of 1976.

I enclose \$ ..... being a donation to The Colong Committee's Fighting Fund.

NAME: ..... (Block letters)  
ADDRESS: ..... (Block letters)  
..... Post Code .....  
SIGNED: ..... Date .....

**STOP PRESS** The Premier announced on 4th August that the State Government would not proceed with the construction of a logging road onto Levers Plateau and would appoint an inter-Departmental Committee to investigate for Cabinet the employment, environmental and economic aspects of the Border Ranges, together with the eventual establishment of a National Park there.