

SAVE COLONG bulletin

THE COLONG COMMITTEE • A National Wilderness Society

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"Polite conservationists leave no mark except the scars on the land that could have been prevented."

David Brower, in the foreward to a Sierra Club publication on wilderness.

"Conservation is like freedom; it can only be maintained by constant vigilance... The last phase of revolution is the return to apathy."

H.R.H. Price Philip, quoted in "Habitat", June, 1979

TERANIA CREEK

Terania Creek is a tributary of the Richmond River which starts about 10 miles south of Mount Warning on the southern slope of the great volcanic shield formed by the ancient outpouring of lava from the mountain. The upper part of the creek is a basin 720 ha. in area which, by reason of its natural protection, contains 400 ha. of unlogged forest of which 170 ha. is rainforest.

Because of its small area, and previous logging, it cannot be described as a wilderness, but it is claimed by the Terania Basin Committee to be the largest intact piece of lowland sub-tropical rainforest left anywhere near Lismore. An unlogged rainforest tract of this size is now a rarity anywhere in the State, and, if we accept the view of the International Union for the Conservation of Nature and the Australian Conservation Foundation, should be preserved. Even more important is the strength of the opposition to the damage which the Forestry Commission intends to allow the loggers to inflict upon the forest.

Up to 500 people camp at the entrance to the forest. Some are there all the time, others come and go, particularly at week-ends. It is not only local residents, or the alternative life-style groups who are protesting. People come from all parts of the north coast, from Queensland, from Sydney, and there are even overseas participants. The camp is well organised, hygienic and

orderly. Every effort is made to maintain good relations with the police, many of whom have the extremely distasteful task of enforcing a policy which they privately oppose. Great courage and determination is being exhibited by those who lie in the path of the bulldozer or climb the trees about to be cut down.

A survey by Reark Research Pty. Ltd. of 400 households in a defined area surrounding Terania Creek revealed that 83% wanted the area to be a nature reserve, and there is widespread support for this view in Lismore.

Why has the logging of this small area of rainforest engendered such strong opposition? It is an area of great natural beauty, but so were Nightcap, Whian Whian and other rainforest areas destroyed under Forestry Commission supervision. One reason for the strength of protest is the large number of local residents who appreciate its beauty. Another is its accessibility. But the main reason is the campaign for the preservation of our last rainforest remnants, now a century old, but re-activated by the Border Ranges Preservation Society and the Byron Flora and Fauna Society in the early 1970's, and taken up by the Colong Committee and other conservation societies in the mid 70's.

That the Terania confrontation should be necessary is a damning indictment of the existing system of land use allocation in natural areas. Land use is dictated by the Forestry Commission, the Department of Mineral Resources and Development and other Government authorities, without

reference to the owners of public land - the people of N.S.W. If this system continues, confrontations can only increase. What kind of demonstration may we expect if Forestry Commission pressure for the immediate logging of Grady's Creek, twice the area of Terania Creek, and so far unlogged, is successful?

Some two years ago the Government set up a Land Study Group, to investigate a proposal for the setting up of a Land Conservation Council. The Colong Committee made a comprehensive submission, but nothing more has been heard of the Council. There is no provision in the new planning legislation for a body of this type capable of deciding on the use of natural areas of State wide significance in accord with the wishes of the people.

The Terania logging is only the latest example of the Forestry Commission's obsession with serving the immediate interests of the sawmillers. To the Commission a forest is neither a thing of beauty nor a part of the National Estate, but a collection of potential logs to be "utilised". This attitude will continue until the Commission's charter (the Forestry Act) is changed to substitute "conservation" for both "utilisation" and the "promotion of the use of timber".

It is regrettable that only a small number of the Terania Creek protesters and their supporters took part in the Border Ranges campaign. Had they voted for the conservation candidate at the last election, Dr. Peter den Exter, it is very unlikely that the logging of Terania Creek would ever have commenced. Their current politicisation gives some hope that the rabidly anti-conservationist Mr. Don Day will find it difficult to retain the seat of Casino.

MINING IN NATIONAL PARKS

by Alex Colley

The Colong Committee was created to oppose mining in a National Park. In an enclave within the southern part of the Kanangra-Boyd National Park there was a "reserve for the preservation of caves". Within this reserve a mining lease was granted to Associated Portland Cement Manufacturers.

The company had no scruples in proposing to mine in a situation surrounded by a national park, and visible from most of the vantage points within the park and from the Blue Mountains towns. It was simply exercising the mining industry's claim that it should be allowed to mine virtually anywhere - i.e. that mining should over-ride land use planning. This claim has been clearly expressed by K.M. Horler, Secretary of the Mineral Sand Producer's Association, as

follows:-

"Any legislation that has the effect of arbitrarily preventing mining on environmental or any other grounds must ultimately bring about a situation where the mining industry is brought to a standstill." (S.M.H. 8/6/79)

There are no minerals which occur exclusively in national parks, or potential parks. Should the day come when 10% of Australia's land surface is dedicated as national park, most of the remaining 2,671,118 square miles would be available for mining, wherever economically exploitable minerals could be found.

The nearest approach to a mineral occurrence confined to a national park is in Kakadu. The Ranger, Jabiluka and Koon-garra uranium deposits are very rich, and two of them very large, though they are by no means our only deposits. A large and increasing number of people would prefer the deposits were left where they are, but they are worth something over \$20 billion at present uranium prices, and the environment has been sold out at this price. The effect of the mining will be much the same as it would have been at Colong, but on a much greater scale. The central part of the park will be dominated by the mining operations. At the cost of a small fraction of the mining profits the mullock, tailings, abandoned mining machinery and buildings etc. could be used to refill the abandoned workings, but this will not be done. It might have been done had the Government not decided to sell its interest in the Ranger project. Dr. Peter Ellyard made the following prediction in July 1978: (Quoted in "Financial Review" 9/8/79)

"It is essential to have... (a bond)... particularly if the AAEC withdraws from the venture by selling its share to the private sector. There is no doubt the Government will wish to do this if it can. While the AAEC are members of the venture then there is a "moral" obligation on the joint venturers to be good boys. This will disappear if they sell their share."

Then they could do what Lake George Mines did at Captains Flat, NSW. There the company went into liquidation at the end of the mining phase and walked away leaving a mess behind. Then the Commonwealth had to spend \$7.5 million to clean up the mess."

Kakadu will therefore be permanently disfigured and radio active material, chemicals, heavy metals etc., leached out of the site will render streams and wetlands sterile for far into the future, even though the companies may succeed in con-

taining these poisons while mining is in progress.

Nobody can doubt that oil explorers will continue pressure for drilling of the reef, even though the Prime Minister has said there will be no drilling, and even though it may sometime be proclaimed as a marine park. No amount of research can eliminate the danger of oil spills, or blowouts such as that which occurred at Intoc 1 well off the coast of Yucatan on June 3rd and has flowed at rates of up to 1.2 million gallons a day ever since then. Visible pollution now covers many hundreds of square miles of the Gulf of Mexico and oil is fetching up in the form of tar balls on the beaches of south Texas, 600 miles to the north. The Mexican State Oil Company states that some 15 off-shore wells go out of control every year. More than half the Australian mainland and large off shore areas consist of sedimentary basins which could contain oil, but the oil interests must explore the reef too.

After years of battling with mineral sand mining companies conservationists succeeded in having Myall Lakes and other coastal areas declared national parks. The rutile and zircon contained in deposits within parks and proposed parks is only a small proportion of the total Australian deposits along our extensive coasts, but the sand miners have renewed their demands to mine within parks. Mr. Oliver, Chairman of the Mineral Sands Producers Association has stated on ABC TV that mineral sands should be mined wherever they occur, including within national parks. The Minister for Mines, the Hon. R.J. Mulock, told a TV interviewer that there was no reason why mining should not continue in a proposed national park after it was gazetted (A. Catford, in letter to Mr. Landa 22/8/79).

In February this year the Minister for Mines, in response to conservation pressure, declared the Ettrema wilderness area to be reserved from mining. This did not prevent the granting of four small leases and the encouragement of prospecting within the area. Mining and prospecting entails roading, costeaning, and other environmental damage. A letter was written to the Minister by the Colong Committee asking why anybody should prospect within a "reserve from mining" if, in fact, mining would not be permitted. Since February we have had four letters telling us that our query was still under consideration, from which we can infer only that the Minister is seeking a formula which will permit prospecting, and mining, in a reserve created to block "claims, mining leases, mining purpose leases and prospecting licenses."

In April we congratulated the State Government on the creation of Wollemi Park. Since then we have learnt of an agreement entitled "Concepts for Compromise" between the Mines Department and the National Parks and Wildlife Service on the subject of coal mining within the "park", which will be a park in name only if mining is allowed. Access to the agreement has been denied. No "compromise" would be necessary unless mining is to be permitted, and Mr. Mulock has confirmed, in a speech to the Coal Preparation Society, that there will be ventilation shafts, pitheads and access roads within the park. Mr. Wran has assured us that there will be no mining in the park, but we can only assume that he was not then aware of the "Concepts of Compromise" agreement.

There are vast reserves of coal in the Eastern States, and if ever we suffer a shortage it will be our own fault for selling our reserves to the highest bidder as quickly as possible. Much of the coal within Wollemi is in broken country, or at considerable depth, factors which have so far precluded mining, though, until the announcement of the park, there was no other hindrance to mining. But we can be certain that demands for mining rights within the park will continue unabated.

The severe environmental damage caused by coal mining is described in Haydn Washington's article on Coal Mining and Nature Conservation. Much of the damage could be prevented if environmental preservation came before profits, but this is highly unlikely.

The above instances of the privileges granted to miners in land use allocation, even within national parks, are by no means exhaustive. Not until the "divine right to mine" is withdrawn from national parks and potential parks by forbidding both prospecting and mining within these areas, will they be parks in fact as well as in name. The mining industry claim that "minerals are where you find them" is not even a half truth. Minerals are only found where you look for them and they are much more likely to be found in the 90% or more of our land surface which is desert or developed countryside than within our rapidly dwindling scenic natural areas.

COAL MINING AND NATURE CONSERVATION - HAVE THEY BEEN COMPATIBLE ANYWHERE IN THE WORLD?

by Haydn Washington

The mining of coal produces the following pollution:-

- 1) Visual (cliff collapse - subsidence)
- 2) Acid mine drainage.

- 3) Iron and Aluminium sulphate, Iron hydroxide.
- 4) Solid mineral debris.
- 5) Colloidal and dissolved products such as heavy metals.

These can be considered point by point.

1) The problems of subsidence are well-known overseas (e.g. U.S.A.). Visual pollution from coal mining takes its worst form in cliff collapse. This has happened at such places as Warragamba Dam, N.S.W. There would not appear to be enough experience to safeguard against the deleterious environmental effects of collapse.

2) Sulphuric acid is produced from the pyrite in the coal when it comes in contact with oxygen and water. Micro-organisms, such as *Thiobacillus* hasten its breakdown. There has been much experience of acid mine drainage problems in countries such as the U.S.A., which will be considered in detail later. Herricks and Cairns (1971) note acid mine drainage produces stress in an aquatic community's structure and may eliminate some organisms. In N.S.W., Corkery (1975) notes that values of pH as low as 1.8 have been recorded from coal mine drainage in the Cessnock area. Generally, the levels are between 2.5 and 4.5 pH units. The Newcom Colliery, near the Wollemi National Park, has produced an effluent that drains into "Blue Lagoon". This has a pH of 3. Any pH under 4.5 is likely to have an effect on aquatic life. When acidity is high, heavy metal levels in solution also tend to be high.

3) Iron compounds, such as ferric hydroxide, are a major source of pollution from coal mines. The iron comes from iron pyrites, it precipitates out at high pH when the acidity drops and blankets streams (in the presence of oxygen). Many authors have noted that it is a problem, among them Herricks (1971), Letterman (1978), Greenfield and Ireland (1978) and Boyer (1977). Boyer noted that fish avoided ferric hydroxide concentrations of 6mg/L. Sykora et alia (1971) noted that ferric hydroxide affects fish and invertebrates at low levels. Even levels below 1.5 mg/L affected egg hatching.

4) Solid mineral debris pollution is a problem, particularly at washeries where the "bone" or "shale" in the coal is stock-piled. Erosion of these can seriously sediment small streams' courses - killing bottom life.

5) Organic compounds such as poly-aromatic hydrocarbons (PAH) are leached from coal. Many of these are toxic, some of them (such as PAH) are known carcinogens. Heavy metal pollution leached from the coal by sulphuric acid formed from the Iron pyrites is a real problem. Metals such as Cadmium, Zinc, Lead are highly toxic to aquatic life.

OVERSEAS EXPERIENCE - AMERICA

Professor Ahmad from Ohio University presented a paper in 1973 on "coal mining and its effect on water quality" to the First World Congress on Water Resources. He states that, "coal mining has seriously degraded the water quality of streams in Appalachia and other parts of the U.S.A., and in some cases underground aquifers". He notes that "the mining of coal has at the present time seriously disturbed this interrelated hydrological system in over eleven million acres of land". He further notes that "in areas where the overburden is thick, underground mining is practised. Large amounts of coal are left in these mines and oxidation is going on. The primary vehicle of transport for the oxidation product is the flowing ground water. Hundreds of unnatural springs are discharging highly acidic water into our streams. No effective method has yet been devised to stop the acid production." There are currently listed thousands of such underground acid sources in the U.S.A. In the Appalachias alone, about 6,000 tons of sulphuric acid is unintentionally produced daily through pyrite oxidation. Ahmad notes that inactive underground mines produce 52% of the total acid catalogued. The ongoing problem of pollution from old mines is a real concern.

Ahmad states that 18,000 miles of streams have been polluted by 50 years of coal mining - of these 13,000 miles of wildlife habitat has been deleteriously affected (13,970 surface acres). He notes that two million acres of land and water have been affected by coal, as well as 281 natural lakes. Clearly, environmental problems of coal are not being solved by the Americans.

Boyer (1977) notes that "mine sealing (i.e. blocking of old shafts) has been done since the 1930's". 84 underground mines were closed over the years. He notes that there has been "only a very general trend of discharge quality improvement". Groundwater can become contaminated. Hill (1969) examined the sealing of one mine, and stated that continuous maintenance "at an estimated expense of up to 10% of the original cost per year" is necessary. "Sealing and land reclamation are not 'one shot' solutions".

Experience in the U.S.A. thus shows that serious long term pollution can be expected from coal mining, and that solutions are not being found. It is this situation which the N.S.W. State Government is seeking to promulgate in National Parks.

DO WE HAVE LOTS OF COAL? SHOULD THE COAL UNDER NATIONAL PARKS BE MINED?

Our coal resources are not limitless. Australia has only 2% of the world's coal and we have 0.3% of the world's population, thus we have only 7 times as much coal per head as the world average. The U.S.A. and Russia have more per head, yet they are not rashly selling off their coal overseas.

Rigby (1978) showed that if our rate of growth of consumption of coal remains zero, then with our present consumption, coal would last for 357 years, or 714 years if our known reserves were doubled. However, our rate of increase of coal consumption is 5%, and on this basis our reserves would last 59 years, and doubled reserves would last 72 years. Should our rate of growth of consumption become 10% (which it appears our politicians are pushing by large export drives) then our current reserves would last only 36 years, and a doubled reserve would last 43 years.

Seen in this perspective we obviously do not have a lot of coal, and we should have a coal conservation policy.

CONCLUSION:

Given that coal mining in N.S.W. only gives employment to 16,000 men, we cannot expect a boom in coal mining to help unemployment very much - these are 16,000 specialised men, in any case. We are apparently eager to sell off a resource which is not, in fact, large, and which future generations of Australians will need. We have no coal conservation program in N.S.W., and appear unwilling to conserve even that small amount of coal that is under National Parks.

Rather, the State Government seems willing to pollute substantially these parks' waterways for a long time, and possibly topple their cliff faces.

Water pollution is unacceptable in National Parks. Water pollution is the main problem from coal mining all over the world. Yet the State Government seems intent on allowing coal mining in the headwaters of clean rivers, such as the Wolgan, inside National Parks. Clearly, this is unacceptable.

WHAT YOU CAN DO?

- 1) Write to the Premier, Mr. N.K. Wran, expressing concern about the proposal to mine coal under National Parks which is likely to destroy some of our natural heritage for future Australians. Ask Mr. Wran why there is no coal conservation policy for N.S.W. and why he is actively promoting increased coal exports overseas?

- 2) Send similar letters to:
Mr. Mulock, the Minister for Mines;
Mr. Landa, the Minister for Planning and Environment; (the address of all three is Parliament House, Sydney, 2000).

Ask Mr. Mulock why he is pushing so hard for coal mining, even at the expense of the environment?

Ask Mr. Landa why he has agreed to coal mining under parks when his portfolio is to protect the environment?

- 3) Send a letter about coal mining under parks to:

Letters to the Editor,
The Sydney Morning Herald, - Or to
Box 506, G.P.O., another
SYDNEY, N.S.W. 2001 paper.

- 4) Write to your local member, protesting about coal mining under National Parks.

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SEE ALSO: "Wilderness and Power" by the Colo Committee, Feb. 1979. Heavy Metal discussion.

LAWS FOR SALE

"The laws began to melt like mists before the Japanese advance. Cattle leases turned into freeholdings. A vague promise to bring some Australian equity into the \$100 million project at some stage satisfied the foreign investment requirements. The State Beach Protection Authority Act was suspended, along with the Petroleum, Coal Mining and Canals acts, on the Iwasaki estate."

Marion Macdonald, writing on Yippon, The Bulletin 3/7/79

FLOGGING THE FORESTS

"In a move that poses potentially devastating consequences for the future of western national forests, President Carter has directed the Secretaries of Agriculture and Interior to increase timber cutting on the public lands. The President instructed the Secretaries 'to take steps consistent with existing law and environmental considerations to increase timber supplies from Federal lands by limited and temporary departures from a non-declining even-flow policy.'"

Sierra Club National News Report, June 1979

It goes on here too, but it is neither limited or temporary.

FORESTRY COMMISSION OFFICERS BIASSED AND PREJUDICED, BUT NOT VILE

"During this (the Border Ranges) and other recent environmental controversies it is regretted that the Commission and individual officers have been subjected to a considerable degree of vilification from groups and people who hold themselves up as defenders of all environmental values. I would like to commend forestry staff who continued to carry out duties with diligence and integrity despite unwarranted and unfounded criticism."

Report of the Commissioner for Forests, June 1978.

"It is discernable, after an exhaustive examination of the Forestry Commission's files and other material gathered in the investigation, that some of your Officers have expressed viewpoints and attitudes towards some of the objectors which display unnecessary bias and prejudice. It is unfortunate that their objectivity may have been clouded by their personal views. Also, on some occasions some Officers appear to have adopted an unnecessary adversary position in relation to the objectors. I regard this as most unfortunate.

It appears to me that there may be some occasions that Officers of the Forestry Commission lose sight of the objects set out in Section 8A of the Forestry Act, 1916, as amended. As I understand it, the role is a dual one - on the one hand the Commission has the object of conserving and utilising timber on Crown lands to the best advantage of the State; and to provide adequate supplies of timber for milling. On the other hand the objects laid down by the Act stress the conservation, preservation and enhancement of the quality of the environment."

The Deputy Ombudsman in a letter to the Forestry Commissioner, 22nd June 1979 on subject of Terania Creek.

CHRISTMAS IS COMING and so is the Colong Committee New South Wales Wilderness Calendar complete with 13 Henry Gold colour photographs. It will be available before the end of October, price, including postage, \$5.50.

PUBLICATIONS FOR SALE BY THE COLONG COMMITTEE (Price includes Postage)

The Save Colong Bulletin, Per Annum	\$5.00
Wilderness in Danger - Michael Bell & Assoc.	\$5.60
Kakadu coloured poster	\$1.50
Border Ranges poster	\$1.50
Habitat - Border Ranges issue	\$1.00
Forest Ecosystems - F.C. Bell	\$5.20
Rainforests - NP & WS	\$5.20
Wilderness in Australia - Helman et al	\$5.00
Colo Wilderness - Henry Gold & Peter Prineas	\$8.50
Colong N.S.W. Wilderness Calendar (Available end Oct.)	\$5.50

FOR NEW SUBSCRIBERS ONLY

THE SECRETARY,
THE COLONG COMMITTEE,
18 ARGYLE STREET,
SYDNEY. N.S.W. 2000

Dear Sir,

I enclose \$2.00 being my subscription to the Save Colong Bulletin to December, 1979.

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

(Mr
NAME (Mrs
(Miss

ADDRESS POSTCODE....

SIGNED DATE