

THE GRANITE BELT NATURALIST.

Monthly Newsletter of the Stanthorpe Field Naturalist Club.

No. 20.

September 1971

P.O. Box 154, Stanthorpe.

Officers and Committee 1971 - 1972

President	Mr. W. Cathcart	Ph.812
Vice Presidents	Mrs.R. Harslett and Mr. T. Chapman	
Secretary	Mr. E. Walker	Ph.888
Treasurer	Miss J. Westcott	
Editors	Mr. D. Pfrunder and Mrs. D. Orr	
Librarian	Mrs.R. Tremeer	
Publicity Officer	Mr. F. Wilkinson	
Bushwalking Representative	Mr. R. McCosker	
Geology	Mr. P. Higgins	
Flora	Mr. B. Dodd	
Fauna	Mrs.Z. Newman	
Youth	Mr. G. Marsden	
Newsletter Sub-Committee	Mrs.B. Krautz and Mrs. W. Cathcart.	

Activities.

Meetings	4th Wednesday of each month
	C.W.A. Rooms 8 p.m.
Field Outings	Sunday preceeding 4th Wednesday.

Annual Subscription.

Single \$1.50

Family \$2.00

Programme.Field Outings:

<u>Place</u>	<u>Date</u>	<u>Leader</u>
Noel Butler's Area	19th. September	Mr. Noel Butler.
Stanthorpe Town Hills and		Mr. P. Higgins &
Little Broadwater	24th. October	Miss J. Westcott.

Meetings:

<u>Subject</u>	<u>Date</u>	<u>Speaker</u>
Fraser Island	22nd. September	Mrs.J. Harslett.
Mechanical Troubles	27th. October	Mr. R. Marsden.

THE GRANITE BELT NATURALIST.Minutes of General Meeting - 25th August, 1971.

The meeting opened at 8 p.m. in the C.W.A. Rooms with 52 members present and 6 apologies.

Minutes of July Meeting: The minutes of the July meeting were confirmed on the motion of Mrs. F. Tremere, seconded by Mrs. Z. Newman.

Inward Correspondence: (i) Newsletters from other Nats. Clubs.

(ii) Letter re proposed visit to Stanthorpe by the Richmond Valley Nats.

(iii) Letter from Mr. G. Hamlyn-Harris re our joining the Y.H.A.

(iv) Letter of thanks from Mr. & Mrs. Carnaby, W.A.

Outward Correspondence: Letter to Adult Education Toowoomba, re advertisement to be inserted in Border Post for August meeting and outing.

Treasurer's Report: Balance on hand \$47.02. On the motion of Miss. J. Westcott, seconded Mr. N. Butler, the Treasurer's Report was received and accounts passed for payment.

Sub-Committee Report: Mr. R. McCosker reported on arrangements being made for the Nats. display at the forthcoming Hobbies Fair.

Business from Minutes: A letter to be sent to the Richmond Valley Nats. giving them the requested material and advising them that our Club will be at Tooloom Falls in January and we would like to meet them there if possible.

General Business: The President expressed thanks on behalf of the Club to Mr. D. Pfrunder and Mrs. D. Orr for their excellent first edition of the Newsletter. Mrs. B. Krautz volunteered to staple, fold, address and mail the Newsletter. She will be assisted by Mrs. W. Cathcart who also volunteered her services.

The President advised of some changes in the Committee responding to the wishes of the people involved. The following designations will now apply:-

Youth Representative Mr. G. Marsden.

Geology " Mr. P. Higgins.

Publicity Officer Mr. F. Wilkinson.

It is to be recorded that Mr. D. Bluhdorn, who lectured to the Club in July has donated a suitable length of rope to the Club for use on outings. Our thanks to this generous member.

Mr. B. McDonagh moved that we draw up a petition to be signed by Club members wishing to advise the Government of our feeling towards a proposed reserve in the Sundown Area. Mr. W. McCosker seconded the motion which was a response to concern expressed by Mr. J. Verri for the protection of wild-life in the area and his endeavours to have the area recognised as some form of reserve.

Motion was carried.

Outings Reports: Mr. E. Ree reported on the August outing to Red Rock Gorge at which 32 persons attended.

Mr. N. Butler outlined the Sept. outing to Dalveen area. Meeting closed at 8.50 p.m.

The programme "Remember Last Year" followed the meeting. This was the showing of a collection of colour slides of last years' outings taken by our members, which was collected and compiled by Mr. R. McCosker and Mr. E. Walker.

Supper was provided to conclude the evening.

Report on outing to Red Rock Gorge, Sunday, 22nd August 1971.

Arriving at Joe Walsh's homestead, roughly 20 miles south of Stanthorpe I was somewhat amazed to find 31 eager people ready to set out for Red Rock Gorge some four miles away. Although the weather was not very favourable at the time, this did not dampen their spirits one bit, and at about 9.15 a.m. we set out in a shower of rain.

Owing to rain the previous night, the countryside looked fresh and clean, and the countless streams, somewhat swollen.

Making good time, and the rain having cleared away, we arrived at the gate, not far from the gorge at about 10.15 a.m.

This was the moment we had all been waiting for, a rest, except Tom Chapman who went looking for birds. With only about a mile to go we set out again, soon to link up with Red Rock Creek, which we followed to the top of the Gorge. It was a very pleasant walk along the creek, as the sun was shining making the numerous waterfalls really worth photographing.

Upon reaching the gorge, we were more than well rewarded for our efforts, with the splendid view, and probably more so with the water flowing over the sheer cliff of the gorge.

After boiling the billy and having a bite to eat, we set out on different routes, to explore and take photos. Those who climbed to the bottom of the gorge, were very impressed with the lush green rain forest, and the beautiful bubbling stream, which tumbled over the moss covered boulders.

With our cameras running hot, we once again assembled at the top of the gorge, packed our gear together and set off for Walsh's homestead.

Arriving back at the homestead at about 3.30pm., a little weary, we sat down and had some afternoon tea, putting a very enjoyable finish to an enjoyable day.

ERIC REE.

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Many thanks, Eric, for your report and a most rewarding outing. As one of our delighted members remarked while contemplating the water flowing over the 300ft. sheer face of Red Rock, "It's 'fantabulous'".

This area to date is comparatively undisturbed and has a wonderful wealth of bird-life and would be well suited to a specialist outing for our bird-watchers.

En route, one could not but wonder at the effort made with pick and shovel by the "old Timers" in making an access road through this harsh trap-rock country to the Sundown Mine, which produced copper, arsenic and some lode tin. On the return route from the Gorge some of our members came across an old abandoned prospecting shaft and the remnants of a one-time prospector's hut.

Some rock samples containing small traces of silver and lead had been excavated, but apparently the mineral content was far below commercial value.

One would have thought the spectacle of the falls and views of the Gorge would have satisfied our camera enthusiasts for the day, but when a number of Diamond Slugs were found on Iron Barks and on the track, cameras were out again and these creatures were photographed in various situations at various angles.

It is hard to visualise creatures of this nature surviving in drought conditions here. It is wonderful how nature re-generates in the good times.

THE GRANITE BELT NATURALIST.More information on the Red Rock Gorge and Dundown areas.

Here are a few points of historical and general interest on the country-side en route to the Sundown and Red Rock Gorge areas supplied by the kind favour of Mrs. J. Harslett.

Ballandean was one of the earliest white settlements in the district.

South of Ballandean you will note the Donnybrook Range. This is much more rugged than it appears, and barred Alan Cunningham's was. (He was the first explorer in this area). He crossed to the south-west to the gap made by the Eight Mile Creek and passed on to Tenterfield Creek, near Mt. Pleasant and on to the Dumaresque River. On the return trip he camped at Undercliff Falls. Then passed along east of the National Park area which he also found too rough to pass through.

Shortly after leaving Ballandean you cross Accommodation Creek which, with Washpool Creek, joins the Severn River at "The Junction" a few miles downstream. Immediately across Accommodation Creek there is a change from "Stanthorpe Granite" to "Altered" or "Porphyritic Granite".

Soon after crossing the grid into Ballandean Station you cross Washpool Creek. To the left along the banks are to be found old aboriginal bora rings - one of the few places they are to be seen on the Granite Belt.

To the right is Ballandean Homestead. Note the grape vine along the front which is over 100 years old. The vine is 27 inches in circumference at the base and it is claimed that it yielded 1,500 pounds of fruit in one season. It originally came from France.

Henry Hayter Nicol was granted a licence to pasture stock on Ballandean Station on 10th November, 1844. Wool at that time was taken by dray to Tenterfield, Grafton, and the Clarence River costing 10/- per ton each way.

On the left about a mile up from the homestead lies the original Ballandean Township Cemetary.

From Walsh's the road becomes much more rugged continuing over several creek crossings and then up over Mt. Lofty leaving Red Rock Gorge on the right.

An aboriginal stockman on Ballandean Run, Archie Marlon, found copper at Sundown in 1888. Lode tin was discovered in 1893, this being one of the earliest "lode" tin mines in the state. It was worked by W. Petzler and Co.

There was a lot of activity from 1915-1921, and then machinery, including a revolutionary furnace and flues for collecting arsenic fumes, was erected. In 1918 difficulty of lack of water was overcome by pumping water from the Severn River.

Red Rock Gorge has carved out a precipitous gorge through slates to the hard granite intrusions below, showing very colourful formations.

It might be an idea to keep this "Introduction to Sundown" for points of interest which may be helpful when there is an opportunity for another outing to this area.

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Man of many Interests.

The death occurred on July 6, after a short illness, of Richard Walter (Mick) Dwyer, aged 63. Born at Riley's Hill in 1908, he married Bess Walker in 1936. With the exception of a few years, his life was spent at Riley's Hill, where he worked firstly at the Riley's Hill Dock, and for the last 16 years at the CSR, Broadwater. A student of natural history all his life, he early became interested in conservation and at the time of his death was a member of the Australian Conservation Foundation. A humanist, with strong feelings about the dignity of man, irrespective of race, creed or colour, he formed many lasting friendships.

THE GRANITE BELT NATURALIST.Man of Many Interests cont.

As a freelance writer, his humorous verse delighted his friends and acquaintances, while his more serious work earned him membership of the Australian Society of Authors.

A devoted family man, his hobbies were geared to the needs of his growing family, changing with the years from simple bush and seashore expeditions with their study of wild-life to searching for gemstones and minerals, in pursuit of which in the last 10 years he covered large areas of N.S.W. and Queensland.

Some members will remember him from earlier outings.

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REMINDERS:

Renewal of Subscriptions: Subscriptions for 1971-72 will be \$1.50 single and \$2.00 family. Anyone wishing to renew his subscription please contact our Treasurer.

Contributions: Contributions from members for our Newsletter would be welcomed. We would like to keep the content of members contributions in the Newsletter as high as possible. Please place all contributions in the hands of the Editors by the second Wednesday of each month.

Specimens: Members are invited to bring along to meetings, any plant, rock or fauna specimens they have found, either on club outings or by themselves for identification or discussion. We are fortunate that the Club has some well qualified and willing members who would be pleased to help in identifying any specimens.

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Outing in the Dalveen Area:

Cars will depart from the Town Park at 9 am. and proceed to Dalveen where outing leader Neol Butler will join them and proceed on the old Warwick road and pass through a very historic area.

Once the boundaries of three great sheep runs in the early nineteenth century, namely Rosenthal, Canning Downs and Maryland, this road was used in the early days by Cobb & Co. and the road that opened up the Stanthorpe area, it also has a link with the past as part of it was built by convicts.

If time permits on this section Historic graves may be visited.

The next portion will be in the Elbow Valley area visiting water falls etc., here we will have lunch and Bar - B - Q facilities are available. Then home via heavy natural forest, areas in parts almost untouched by human hands, and historic Maryland Station.

Noel has designed this outing to suit all members of the Club from the very young to our most senior members, and plenty of scope for walking and climbing for those members wishing to do so.

NATS. signs will be erected as far as Elbow Valley for late comers.

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THE GRANITE BELT NATURALIST.Information re Timber on Roads from Department of Forestry.

There appears to be a misapprehension in the minds of some landholders as to the position concerning damage to or destruction of trees on roads adjacent to their properties.

THE LEGAL POSITION:

Excluding Main Roads, which are under the control of the Main Roads Commission, it is an offence under the Forestry Act to destroy, get, damage, mark, move, use or in any way interfere with trees on roads without a permit granted under that Act. The penalty for such offence is not less than \$10 nor more than £200.

Applications for permits to destroy trees on roads should be made to the nearest Forest Officer.

The consent of the Local Authority must also be obtained, but this in itself is insufficient and the landholders must in all cases also apply to the Forest Officer, and secure his permission before commencing operations.

THE VALUE OF TREES ON ROADS:

Trees on roads have many values:-

- (1) They provide shade for travellers, both man and beast.
- (2) They inspire a love of beauty and they improve the scenic aspect. It is undeniable that tree-lined or tree-dotted roads are more pleasing to the eye than roads which are completely bare. The scenic aspect has a practical economic value, since visitors will return to beautiful areas and will avoid ugly places.
- (3) They are an important reserve source of timber supply. Trees growing on roads often yield piles and girders for bridges, logs for sawing, fence posts, poles for farm buildings, etc.
- (4) They furnish windbreaks. It is recognised that cultivations open to prevailing winds do not yield as well as those which are protected. Blowing away of top soil also has a deleterious effect on property. Farmers in seeking to destroy trees, are inclined to forget these facts because it is more obvious that crops in the immediate vicinity of road trees are affected by root competition. With the adoption of pulling on a large scale, the extent of treeless areas on our western plains has been greatly enlarged. Retention of trees on our roads is playing some part in interrupting the continuity of these treeless areas.
- (5) Trees on roads or hillsides can act as brakes on water erosion and can minimise damage both to roads and properties by heavy rain.
- (6) Trees provide a source of honey supply.
- (7) They are the nesting places of insect-eating native birds - allies of the farmer.
- (8) Trees often possess scientific or other values.
- (9) Their leaves may be of value for stock-fodder or other purposes.

WHY DESTROY TREES ON ROADS?

The main reason put forward by persons wishing to destroy trees on roads are -

- (a) They interfere with adjacent vegetation;
- (b) They are a danger to nearby improvements.

THE GRANITE BELT NATURALIST.Information re Timber on Roads from Department of Forestry Cont.:

It is recognised that trees sometimes affect crops, grass etc., growing nearby, but in this regard the overall advantages and disadvantages must be taken into consideration and each case considered on its merits.

Where a landholder desires to destroy trees on roads on the grounds that such are dangerous to his improvements, the reasons for stating that such trees are dangerous must be furnished. In this regard the size, direction of lean, and general health of the tree are important, as well as the location and nature of the improvements considered to be threatened. It is pointed out that it is usually open to the landholder to erect structures where trees on roads do not overhang, and that in many cases trees are a protection against wind damage to buildings.

If destruction of trees is desired for any other reason, such must be fully stated.

Artificial establishment of trees to serve as windbreaks is likely to be a slow and fairly costly process. By protecting trees along our roads from damage and destruction we are preserving natural windbreaks.

The co-operation of landholders and of the public generally in assisting to preserve tree-growth on our roads is earnestly sought.

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Thoughts on a Past Tragedy.

At this time of year we can often delight in watching many of the birds which frequent our gardens regularly or near-by areas industriously gathering material for nesting, darting among the blossom and after insects, or collecting grubs and beetles and things at nesting time.

Not least among those displaying much evidence of nesting activity here at this time is a family of Welcome Swallows.

Besides the nesting activity of our local bird-life, some large flocks of the common Straw-necked Ibis are on the move over this area.

When we constructed a pumping shed at the dam about eight years ago a Welcome Swallow family decided to settle-in. The Welcome Swallow is well known and quite common, often frequenting settled areas and park-lands, and is distributed throughout Australia and Tasmania. Mostly the Welcome Swallow is migratory, generally congregating in large flocks during the Autumn before leaving for the warmer northern parts of Australia, although in many areas numbers remain throughout the year. They are cute little critters with a sweet, twittering call as they sweep along after small flying insects.

The family which settled in our pump shed nested every year on a beam under the roof. (Their general nesting habits are to build under eaves of buildings etc., and in sheltered caves; the nest is cup-shaped, constructed of mud pellets reinforced with pieces of grass and lined with grass or other material such as horse hair.) We often wished they would nest somewhere else as they left conspicuous evidence of their presence below the nest which required cleaning up.

These swallows had not left the area since they arrived, even remaining during the Winter period, when they might have been expected to migrate to warmer weather.

One day towards the end of September 1969, we found the family had died. The young birds in the nest had died; one of the older birds had died still clutching the outside of the nest; another was dead on a beam near the

THE GRANITE BELT NATURALIST.Thoughts on a Past Tragedy Cont.

nest while another lay on the floor.

The circumstances seemed a little unusual. We had not used toxic sprays at that time of year and anyway no spray residue could seep back to the dam from where sprays were mixed. It was unlikely that up-stream neighbours would have used toxic sprays at that time, and other birds seemed to be present in their usual numbers.

The most likely cause was probably the weather. Most of the Winter of 1969 was unseasonably mild. It was the same over most of South-Eastern Australia. A great Winter for pruning. The birds agreed Winter was gone and were nesting early. Then in September when the weather should have been warming up, it changed, and for three weeks after storms broke on the 4th, the weather was exceptionally cold. On the 22nd the grass was covered with light snow and the maximum temperature that day was only 46°. The shed where the birds had nested was in a particularly exposed position to the Westerlies and although weather-proof, was specifically designed to allow adequate ventilation for the motor in hot weather.

About the same time we discovered the loss of the Swallows, there were reports that Straw-necked Ibis and their young had died in thousands in their breeding colonies in the swamps of the Murray system.

The Straw-necked Ibis is one of our most useful birds. We often see flocks of them on pastoral land devouring injurious insects or their larvae. They are usually in flocks, flying and turning in echelon. They also frequent swamps, the margins of lakes and streams as well as pastoral land. Their habits are nomadic and they travel over vast areas of country. They breed in colonies which usually number thousands of birds. Islands of reeds in swampy areas are the favourite situations for their colonies.

Perhaps predictably, spokesmen from some Southern Universities immediately blamed the use of Agricultural Chemicals for the death of the birds, but it seems this idea was never substantiated.

Doubtless the true cause of the tragedy may never be known. Perhaps some epidemic among the birds was responsible. Those best equipped to provide an explanation would be those familiar with the areas affected.

So, while any suggested reason now must remain speculation, it appears that with similar unseasonably mild weather during the Winter followed by a series of exceptionally cold snaps during September in both areas when the birds were nesting, there could be some link between the loss of the swallows in the pump-shed and the Ibis in their breeding colonies.

Well, another family of Swallows is planning to nest and there have been a number of large flocks of Ibis flying over lately. The Ibis is also called Dryweather-bird; most week-ends have been wet recently, perhaps next weekend.....

D. PFRUNDER.