

THE GRANITE BELT NATURALIST.

Monthly Newsletter of the Stanthorpe Field Naturalist Club.

No. 26

April 1972

P.O. Box 154, Stanthorpe.

Officers and Committee 1971 - 1972.

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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
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Programme.Field Outings:

<u>Place</u>	<u>Date</u>	<u>Leader</u>
Undercliffe Falls - Rivertree	23rd April	Mr. F. Wilkinson
Tenterfield Area - Extra outing	7th May	Mr. P. Ingram
Mystery Camp-out	20th-21st May	Mr. W. Cathcart
Texas Caves	25th June	Mr. D. Bluhdorn
Spicers Gap Saturday camp-out	22nd - 23rd July	Mr. T. Chapman
Harsletts' Area	20th August	Mr. J. Harslett

Meetings:

<u>Subject</u>	<u>Date</u>	<u>Speaker</u>
Orchids	26th April	Mr. P. Grant
Basic Geology	24th May	Dr. Branch
New England National Park	28th June	Mr. J. Poulton
Subject of own choosing	26th July	Mr. B. Dodd
"Remember Last Year"	23rd August	Film Night.

THE GRANITE BELT NATURALIST.Minutes of General Meeting held 8th March, 1972.

Vice President Mr. T. Chapman presided over the meeting where 42 members were present and 9 apologies were received.

Minutes of Previous Meeting: Minutes of February meeting not published due to this being an early and special meeting to correspond with Festival week.

Inward Correspondence: (i) Letter from Mr. H. McKechnie advising us that negotiations for acquisition of private properties for a "Sundown" National Park are proceeding. A map of the proposed area was also included.

(ii) Letter from Mr. P. Grant accepting our invitation to lecture to the club on "Orchids" on our April meeting.

(iii) Newsletters from other Nats Clubs.

(iv) A request for a donation from the Pioneers' Dinner Fund.

Outward Correspondence: (i) Letter to Toowoomba Adult Education with advice of March meeting and outing.

(ii) Letter to Mr. P. Grant seeking his services for our April meeting.

Moved Mrs. R. Marsden, seconded Mr. Ian Jackson that the inward correspondence be received and the outward endorsed. Carried.

Treasurer's Report:

Balance 29.2.72	\$52.06
Expenditure	6.00
	<u>\$46.06</u>

Moved Miss J. Westcott, seconded Mrs. J. Harslett that the Treasurer's Report be received and accounts passed for payment. Carried.

General Business: Moved Mr. R. Marsden seconded Mr. J. Verri that the Club donate \$5.00 to the Pioneer Dinner Fund. Carried.

Mrs. J. Harslett expressed the view that we should have a deputation to meet the Brisbane Nats. at Girraween on the second weekend of the Festival. All interested members are requested to be at the Park to lead walks on Saturday and Sunday.

A report on the conducted bus tours for the Festival Week was given by Mrs. J. Harslett.

Some confusion now exists over removal of grapes from the vineyard of Mr. Wise of Glen Aplin.

The meeting closed at 8.30 pm.

Our special guest for Festival Week, Mr. Bob Lacey, spoke to the Club on Antarctica and his experiences during the 1955 expedition.

A vote of thanks to Mr. Lacey was given by Mr. R. Marsden.

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REMEMBER: Two outings planned within the next month!

1. Outing to Undercliffe Falls and Rivertree - Sunday 23rd April
Leader - Mr. Frank Wilkinson.

2. Outing to Gerard State Forest, east of Tenterfield - Sunday
7th May - Leader - Mr. Philip Ingram.

This will be a new and interesting area to many of us.

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THE GRANITE BELT NATURALIST.Swanfels Outing:

After some rearrangement and shuffling of players at Weeroona Park on Sunday, 19th March, several car loads (about 30) left for the rendezvous with Ed McCulloch in Warwick.

A short break while Ed clued all on the venue for the day.

First and thoroughly interesting stop was at the property of Mr. Hales, about 14 miles East of Warwick where all viewed very ancient farm machinery. Three monsters of combines looked huge, heavy and unweildly and I'm sure that the horses of years ago shared our sentiments. Several other pieces were worthy of note :- a corn crusher and

a saw bench which used to be a type of wagon on which sandstones were cut and shaped at a quarry near Mr. Hales property. Sandstone blocks cut from this quarry by this bench were used in the construction of the Warwick Roman Catholic Church.

Of considerable interest to "shutter-bugs" was the enamelled sign which assured us that at one time "The Daily Mail - One Penny" was available. Some found a spot, where many a Daily Mail was probably read, to be a perfect background for photography.

The second stop was at the stone laid to commemorate the Centenary of the Swanfels district and the 75th Anniversary of the State School.

On to Swanfels Creek where our Club miners shouldered picks, shovels, hammers of all shapes and sizes and sugar bags, cut down water bags etc. for the big 'dig-in'. Much hard toil was done by many who were delighted to gouge out the very beautiful opalised rocks from the holes of varying depths and sizes high up on the steep creek banks. This proved to be a fascinating episode and even those of us who consider rocks only ammunition for hurling at crows, found ourselves with hats, pockets and even handkerchiefs full of the beautifully coloured rocks.

Though no fortunes were won, a wealth of beauty was unearthed and excitement ran high amongst the newer miners.

Leaving the "diggings" some sat quietly by the creek to sketch, some fossicked in the creek bed and others gaily 'tripped' along the creek banks in search of the leaders Ed and Peter. Water holes, rocky crossings, grassy banks were towered over by the rather high, rugged mountains all around.

The 'trippers' either found the leaders or were found by the leaders and were led again to the diggings, where again the tools of trade were shouldered and the treck up the steep bank to the food area was undertaken, and suprisingly achieved.

Cuppas enjoyed, apples dispensed by courtesy of the McCoskers, Jean Harslett called for order to thank sincerely Ed McCulloch for arranging such an exciting and enjoyable outing.

An inspection on the spot was made of the Travelling Rock Shop.

Thanks also to Peter Higgins and Ed McCulloch for the supply of rocks made available for those unable to attend the outing.

Though overcast the weather had been kindly and all present enjoyed a splendid outing.

On the return journey one vehicle desperately tried to acquire a new bonnet mascot (a prime vealer) but missed!! -- Phew -- !!

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Did you know: Pigs, antelopes and cows are more sensitive tasters than man!!

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THE GRANITE BELT NATURALIST.MINING AT RIVERTREE:

Our main outing for April is scheduled for Sunday, 23rd April, when Mr. Frank Wilkinson will be Outing Leader for the day to the Undercliffe Falls Rivertree area. Below is some background to the mining at Rivertree by kind permission of the "Stanthorpe Border Post":-

"In the very early days of settlement in the Stanthorpe area well before tin was discovered in Quart Pot Creek small deposits of alluvial gold had been found on the Eastern slopes of the ranges descending towards Rivertree. The old shepherds in the very early days often supplemented their wages by panning small amounts of this gold. However no large deposits were ever found.

Later silver bearing quartz was found in the Rivertree area and at one stage the District was the scene of quite a rush.

In about 1910 a company was formed which purchased these Rivertree Mines and a considerable amount of capital was raised. It was apparently considered that a large body of payable ore was available and a full ore crushing and treatment plant was built.

A massive brick chimney is still standing on the grazing property at Rivertree, owned by Mr. Jack Burton. This is all that remains of the mining venture apart from the holes in the ground.

A part of the equipment taken into the mine was the 20 ton boiler which was taken down the steep Rivertree road by wagon and horse teams.

This was a task to be undertaken only by skilled teamsters and brothers Joe and Arthur Johnson so well known as teamsters of the Stanthorpe district undertook the job.

The wheels for the wagon were of solid timber cut from box trees. The tyres for them were made and fitted by local blacksmiths Schaffer and Wilson.

Joe and Arthur Johnson used three teams of five horses to pull the wagon and had a terrific job when going down the steep Rivertree road, especially when negotiating the famous Devil's Pinch.

It was necessary to attach logs behind the wagon to act as a brake and at some parts they even had to use blocks and tackle to ease it down.

The job was successfully completed and the boiler put to work.

The story goes that the first load of ore was sent to Sydney for assay and that the manager at the time received back a telegram saying - "sack all hands including yourself."

Whether that is true or not the mine never produced any appreciable amount of silver and eventually closed down.

The following poem written on September 23rd, 1911 by the late Mr. Bob Gunn appears to sum up the opinion of many at the time:

The Rivertree Mines.

A heap of stones, or a broken shaft
 A tunnel that's had a fall,
 Those are the signs of Rivertree mines,
 Where they never mine at all.
 While old Tooloom is full of holes,
 Where the miners gave it best,
 Save some poor looncys, who lost their souls
 In search of a gander's nest.
 Where the ranges rise up to the skies,
 From the rocky river bed,
 And o'er the hills that wild geese fly,
 On the western watershed.

THE GRANITE BELT NATURALIST.The Rivertree Mines (Cont).

But the time has come when things will hum,
 And the river run with wine,
 For the great big kings who do those things,
 Have floated their great combine.
 And the happy dream of Johnson's team,
 Coming loaded down with gold,
 The pay at last is coming to pass,
 For Rivertree mines are sold.
 They will drink champagne, and shout again,
 On that great and purple day,
 Motor cars will glide down the mountain side,
 And the wild geese swan's eggs lay.
 If you want to know if this is so,
 There's one who'll tell you true,
 In forty days the mines will blaze,
 With a bright electric blue.
 Meantime I fear that Anthony's beer,
 will be all that we can stand."

(We believe there is more).

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Here is Frank's Programme for the Outing:

Our next outing is to Undercliffe Falls and Rivertree, leaving the Park at 9.30 am. on April 23rd, we cross the Border and proceed to Amosfield (9 miles) where we turn at the sign reading "WOODENBONG" and a nearby one reading "LEGUME", going 1 mile, we turn at a sign reading "UNDERCLIFFE FALLS 5 m and RIVERTREE 17m.". Along this gravel road we turn into a paddock at a sign reading "UNDERCLIFFE FALLS" (please close the gate!) and proceed to the Falls area.

Here the more energetic can climb to the bottom of the Falls by a rough track (10 minutes), others may explore rock pools along the creek at the top. After lunch it is intended to go on to Rivertree, where old silver mines and smelter stack can be seen, also rather good views of mountain scenery along the way and at the junction of the Koreelah River and the Boonoo Boonoo we see the start of the North arm of the Clarence River.

Please exercise care when driving on the gravel road, a few bends and potholes will be encountered.

FRANK WILKINSON.

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Extra Outing to Tenterfield Area:

Programme is as follows: Sunday 7th May, trip to Gerard State Forest.

Cars depart Weeroona Park Stanthorpe at 9 am. for Tenterfield. Meet at Park near Tenterfield Swimming Pool (Junction of New England and Mt. Lindsay Highways) at 9.45 am., then proceed on the Bruxner Highway for approximately 28 miles east (on bitumen road) to Gerard State Forest, then through Forest Roads to Fire Sighting Tower which should provide some excellent views for miles around. Distance of return trip to Stanthorpe approximately 130 miles.

PHILIP INGRAM.

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THE GRANITE BELT NATURALIST.A GRANITE EMPIRE:

A small empire in the clouds but fifty miles in length - a belt of pine-clad granite mountains that cradle the Severn River, and so giving to Australia her greatest river system, the Murray-Darling.

The stamping ground for lovers of freedom, with Stanthorpe its hospitable capital. A land whose soil haveing crumbled and drifted from immense monoliths of a by gone age, has produced for Queensland her most lucious fruits rare minerals and a bland and healthful climate. A land of brilliant greens, blues, amethyst; rock-ribbed ravines fading into mist. Valleys and landscapes clothed with a rpofusion of wild flowers that belong to the Mesozoic age, a period antedating our own by millions of years.

The most beautiful way to Queensland is through the Granite Belt, and somewhere in this small empire you can own the home of your dreams. Here the pigments for the artists' brush. Here the peace of ancient mountains. Here the opportunity to live.

Something of the coolness of the winds that blow down through the granite heights seems to have crisped the air and atmosphere which draws you, but - how many people can rightly say "I know that area. I have tramped it from top to bottom from east to west." Few of us could rightly say they have done so, and yet it has been laid out to us for countless years.

Most people have climbed the first pyramid, and a few the second, some have walked around two circular tracks provided in the National Park and they could say they have seen the Granite Belt. - Well - I suppose they have, but in this instance it is not a case of "seen one seen them all".

Take for instance Castle Rock (oo7 246W) height 3,600 feet. A large mass of rock in the middle of the scrub, which can be easily viewed, photographed painted etc. from the dining tables at the park rest area.

Now let us look and explore the right and proper way. A well defined track which starts from in front of the ranger's home, winds its way through some interesting country to the foot of the hill. If you are thinking of embarking on this trip with the family, a container of water would be most useful for water is extremely rare on this 1¼ mile track. A track marked by white arrows takes one to the top of the "castle" where one realizes that the effort was worth while. A "new" view of the country and the ability to look in every direction for some considerable distance are only two of the package 'deals' which come with this mountain. Climbing, I feel is far easier than the Pyramids and the distance to cover on slopes is "a flea bite in the ocean".

If you are feeling 'chirpy' perhaps a hop step and jump from here to Mt. Norman would complete your day. A quotation from an early tourist guide describes this area "The Valley of the Giants". This valley which lies close to Ballandean, is a paradise for the camper. It is a small province ruled by granite giants who dwelling there through aeons of time, have guarded its portals and provided the tranquility of an older age. There are the great Domes, the Wombat Caves, the Battlements, Mt. Norman, and other spots where naturalists can camp and study the habits of Lyre Birds and Wombats, and for those who crave for the open range, a camp and relaxation there are days in this valley which drowse you with the lazy song of bees and rippling streams.'

For those who wish to explore unheeded, perhaps some of the Council commons may answer your need. While these do not provide the same adventures they can prove very interesting. Wild flowers and wild life are to be found sometimes in far greater varieties than can be found in National Parks. There are some excellent pieces of ground for the study of nature in these fields, yet so little is seen of people visiting them.

THE GRANITE BELT NATURALIST.A GRANITE EMPIRE Cont.

I realize that they are not advertised like our parks, but something could be done in the way of letting the public know about them, but we must guard against any mistreating of the available "resources" which have to date, in most cases, remained untouched.

Another interesting place to visit is "Winsted" or "Finney's Falls" a short walk from town out along Greenup Street, towards Diamondvale will bring you to the area in under half an hour.

After a shower of rain the water rushing between and over rocks can be heard in town if one listens carefully. Many varieties of small daisies and wild flowers bloom here in picturesque surroundings. This area is slowly becoming "inhabitated" by the "eyesore" of nature, namely glass and rubbish, but there is still something there that will please you.

There is still a lot to see in our district, a percentage of us will never see any of it, for some people never see anything, but we can make the effort to see some of it, be it large or small for our empire will always be here.

ROSS ALLAN DAVID.

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TOP-KNOT PIGEONS AT NESTING TIME:

We have a pair of Top-knot Pigeons (*Ocyphaps lophotes*) nesting right outside the kitchen window in the Melaleuca. The nest is such a frail structure, that you can see the eggs from underneath, but its making was a most tender and loving ceremony to witness.

Mrs. Pigeon sat throughout while Mr. Pigeon made numerous trips throughout the whole of one day and half of the next with sticks. Each time he landed several feet from her, side-stepped down the branch, and cheek to cheek, placed the stick in her beak. Then he carefully side-stepped up the branch again, nodding up and down about five times saying 'ook, ook, ook, ook, ook, and flew off for another stick.

The routine never varied except when he sometimes placed a stick in the nest himself. She then waited until he flew off and was out of sight and fixed it up.

She has been sitting patiently on the eggs throughout sunshine and rain for over a week now, occasionally calling to her mate for a change over of duty, while she has a quick wing stretch and a bite to eat.

The two eggs took just two weeks to hatch and the fledglings took slightly less than two weeks to grow feathers and wings sufficiently strong for the babies to be launched.

MRS. D. GORDON,
"MYALL PARK",
GLENMORGAN.

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Did you know: The texture and size of the feathers which a bird has depends on the type of life it leads. An owl's feathers are soft and downy and allow it to fly quietly, but not swiftly, those of an Hawk are shorter and lie closer to the body so there is little resistance to the air and it can fly swiftly. Feathers of water birds are furnished with oil from special glands which make them waterproof.

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THE GRANITE BELT NATURALIST.FAUNA OF THE GRANITE BELT - G. Mack.

The State of Queensland comprises a wide range of faunal environments varying from tropical rain forest with rainfall up to 200 inches per annum to arid areas averaging 8 inches and less. From tropical in the northern coastal districts to sub-tropical in the south, conditions gradually become dry to arid west of the Main Divide towards the centre of the continent. The only exception is a temperate area on the southern part of the coastal range, a portion of which, known as the Granite Belt, embraces the Stanthorpe district. It is here that fruits of the temperate zone are grown in Queensland, and it is here that the northern limit of range is reached by a number of southern birds and other animals.

Lyrebirds: The presence of these forms within the boundaries of Queensland provides an added feature of interest in the fauna of the district. Otherwise the general run of mammals, birds and other animals is the same or is similar to those present over a large part of coastal eastern Queensland.

The outstanding member of this more southern group is the grandest of all birds, the Superb Lyrebird (*Menura novae-hollandiae*). It is present towards the New South Wales border among the giant granite boulders which are so characteristic of the district. The species was more wide-spread and better known in the early days when the lyre shaped tail of the male was not uncommon as a decoration in the homes of settlers. It is now comparatively rare and restricted to a small area. Fires, rather than settlement have brought about this state of affairs, and only the efforts of the people of the district will prevent its extinction in this State. From every point of view it is worth while saving.

Two areas in the vicinity of Wyberba have been declared National Parks, but this is not enough. All the boulder covered hills should be included and the strongest possible action should be taken against those who deliberately light fires.

The Stanthorpe lyrebirds were first mentioned in literature around 1924. Spencer Roberts, a physician who practiced in Stanthorpe, was a keen bird observer and with the aid of some old residents he set out to find the birds about which he had heard so much. Not only did he find them, but he got permission to collect specimens for proper examination and comparison. This led to the Stanthorpe birds receiving a distinctive name, *edwardi*, after Edward, then Prince of Wales, nor Duke of Windsor.

Voice Without Peer: The male of this magnificent bird has a voice that is without peer in the world of birds. In addition to its own calls, it repeats the calls of other birds of the forest to perfection, and its display, with the tail draped over the back in a semicircle showing the silver colour of the under-surface against the quiet greyish-brown of the bird's body, is inspiring in its beauty. This kind of performance is usually given while the bird is standing on a specially prepared mound or perched on a log or a boulder.

The male generally moves from one mound to another within his own territory during the nesting season calling, displaying and feeding. He takes no part in the building of the large domed nest with side entrance, or in the incubating of the single egg. These matters are attended to entirely by the female. The egg takes six weeks to hatch, and the chick is fed for six weeks in the nest and for a time after leaving the nest.

To successfully rear a single young one takes the best part of five months; one a year if a pair is fortunate. Is it any wonder that the lyrebird can be so readily reduced to the point of extinction?

THE GRANITE BELT NATURALIST.FAUNA OF THE GRANITE BELT Cont.

The nest, by the way, may be placed on the ground, at varying heights in trees, or more commonly in the Granite Belt, on a ledge on one of the big boulders.

I should perhaps add that the Superb Lyrebird is quite distinct from the Albert Lyrebird which is present in the rain forest in the Lamington National Park to the East, and that both species are strictly protected.

The Wombat:

In contrast to the grace and beauty of the lyrebird is the stockily-built, short-limbed marsupial known as the wombat (*Phascolomys ursinus*). It, too, is essentially a southern form, and it is present among the granite boulders. Like most of the marsupials, the wombat is nocturnal in habit, but one would have to be fortunate to come upon a specimen even in the hours of darkness. Their great burrows, with entrances large enough to take a human being, may be seen at the base of a tree or a boulder.

The wombat is probably the most powerful of living marsupials. It may attain to about 80lb. in weight, and a poorly constructed fence is of little avail when it wishes to pass. However, the dark brown, lumbering wombat is not common and therefore unlikely to cause trouble in this respect.

Grey Possum:

A distinctive form of the grey or brush-tailed possum (*Trichosurus vulpecula*) is present; and one of the most delightful of the marsupials, the largest of the gliding possums, the greater glider (*Scolinobates volans*) is fairly numerous.

The gliders, all five species, surely belong in the realms of the fairy tale, yet no Australian author, as far as I am aware, has thought fit or has known sufficient to introduce them to children.

The gliders vary in size from about five inches from tip of snout to end of tail in the pigmy, to three feet over-all in the greater, the main species of the Stanthorpe district. The latter is a joy to see and to examine. It is blackish-grey above, white beneath, and the fur is long, silky to the touch and dense. Fortunately, the pelts have never found favour with the fur trade.

Gliding is made possible by the presence of a membrane on each side of the body stretching from fore-limb to hind-limb. The animals travel in the trees, or rather from tree to tree, and never on the ground.

They climb to the top of a high eucalypt and glide down to the trunk of another tree at a distance. This is repeated over and over again, and a mile or more may be covered in this way to a suitable feeding area. The return journey is carried out in the same way before sunrise, and when daylight comes, the gliders are safely curled up in their nests in the hollow limbs of trees.

Despite the beauty and the many engaging qualities of these marsupials and aside from the fact that all are now strictly protected, they make poor pets. Many of them, including the different kinds of possums, gliders, and the well-known Koala are wedded to the eucalypt or gum tree forests.

Destroy the eucalypts, and the animals will be destroyed; and conversely, the animals are essential to the welfare of the eucalypts. The same may be said, of course, about a good many native birds, insects and other forms of life. The one is necessary for the good of the other.

THE GRANITE BELT NATURALIST.FAUNA OF THE GRANITE BELT Cont.Rare Carnivores:

The carnivorous marsupials such as the so-called tiger cat, brown with white spots; the brush-tailed marsupial rat or phascogale, grey with black bushy tail; and the marsupial mouse are now rare. Indeed, their status in the district is altogether doubtful, but there is always room for hope while some of the granite hills retain cover.

This cover is equally necessary for many of the smaller birds, especially the many honeyeaters and flycatchers. To these may well be added the family parties of blue wrens, of limited range in southern Queensland, and the delightful scarlet robin, confined to the southern part of the range. But all the birds are attractive.

What is finer than the call of the magpie or one of the butcher-birds on a bright frosty morning; the loud, sharp call of the whistlers as they move from tree to tree while seeking food, or the laughing call of the Kookaburra as the day closes?

Apart from seeing a male flyre-bird in display, I know of no finer sight among the birds than the effortless flight of a wedge-tailed eagle on high. I have stood in the valley below Mount Norman and watched a pair taking off from the highest point. I hope that the pair is still there, and that no thoughtless person has got near them with a gun. This is one of the magnificent eagles of the world, and one of the most beneficial birds in Australia.

Uncommon Snake:

Only a few of the more prominent or better known living vertebrates have been discussed in these notes, and there is just one other, a reptile, that I should like to mention - the white-spotted black snake. This is an uncommon species, restricted in distribution to south-east Queensland from the range to the coast.

On the coast, specimens are practically wholly black in colour. West towards and on the range, most examples are black with some cream-coloured spots; but at least two specimens obtained in the Stanthorpe district can best be described as blackish-brown in colour.

The fauna of your district and of this country deserves considerate treatment and it must be conserved. Not from an idealistic or sentimental point of view, but for practical purposes. It is essential for our material welfare.

Courtesy "Stanthorpe Border Post".

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