



# NEWSLETTER NATIONAL PARKS ASSOCIATION OF NSW INC

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**SOUTHERN SYDNEY BRANCH**

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**NPA Southern Sydney Branch Evenings  
Speakers**

Date	Time	Zoom Link	Topic	Speaker
15 <sup>th</sup> July	7.15pm to 9.30pm	<a href="https://us02web.zoom.us/j/8102670640?omn=84015111024">https://us02web.zoom.us/j/8102670640?omn=84015111024</a>	Our urban trees; their value, their threats and what we can do.	Rhonda Daniels
19 <sup>th</sup> August	7.15pm to 9.30pm	<a href="https://us02web.zoom.us/j/8102670640?omn=84015111024">https://us02web.zoom.us/j/8102670640?omn=84015111024</a>	Invasive species: their threats and what we need to do	Andrew Cox
16 <sup>th</sup> September	7.15pm to 9.30pm	<a href="https://us02web.zoom.us/j/8102670640?omn=84015111024">https://us02web.zoom.us/j/8102670640?omn=84015111024</a>	Bushwalking; gear, tips and more. All you want to know and extra.	Mark Goodson in conversation with Brian Everingham
21st October	7.15pm to 9.30pm	<a href="https://us02web.zoom.us/j/8102670640?omn=84015111024">https://us02web.zoom.us/j/8102670640?omn=84015111024</a>	How healthy is Royal National Park? What does the scorecard tell us?	Brendon Neilly
18 <sup>th</sup> November	7.15pm to 9.30pm	<a href="https://us02web.zoom.us/j/8102670640?omn=84015111024">https://us02web.zoom.us/j/8102670640?omn=84015111024</a>	The coming “fire season” and what it might tell us	To be confirmed
December			Xmas Picnic	



**Notice of our AGM**

And please note that the September meeting (16<sup>th</sup>) will also be our formal AGM. It's where we briefly report on our past year, elect new office bearers (please feel free to put up your hand and volunteer to help run our association) and generally hope that we can do even better in 2025.

## A True History of Coal Pollution in the Upper Hacking River

Ross Jeffree SSEC

Environmental activism by the Sutherland Shire Environment Centre (SSEC) and its membership in relation to coal pollution in the Hacking River has recently included a Symposium at the Hazelhurst Gallery and appearances as presenters in the film 'Coal Creek'\*. These activities have also inspired a scientific collaboration with the University of Wollongong and The Australian Nuclear Science & Technology Organisation (ANSTO). This study will take sediment cores above the Audley Weir to determine a true history of coal pollution events, potentially extending back to the 1940's, up to the present. The study will help to address the increasing concern with environmental management at the Peabody Colliery, with the increasing publicity around pollution events which is prompting the need for greater scrutiny of its current and historical environmental track record.

To better understand the environmental impacts of the mine's activities, it's important to place current pollution incidents in the context of a longer time record. Examining the historical record can reveal if these incidents are part of an ongoing pattern or unusual events. This study will also determine the levels of pollutants associated with these events, their contributions to rates of sedimentation above the Audley Weir, and potentially its contribution to the current disutility of the Weir's Causeway during extreme rain events.

\*James O'Conner's film Coal 'Creek-the story of a mine, a creek and a platypus community' (2024);

<https://youtu.be/Ju1BbyVLtM?si=hQme89jQh88KuGEo>



## The Early Evolution of (Royal) National Park as a Science-aware Organisation

Gary Schoer

When the “National Park” was established in 1879, the concept of the value of Conservation of lands to conserve biodiversity (a term not used in the 1893 “Official Guide” documenting deliberations of the Trustees between establishment and this earliest edition of a guidebook.) The verdant nature of landscape and majestic trees were all acknowledged in the early years, but by far the greatest expenditure from yearly government grants and even donations by several of the Trustees were for land clearing related to picnic areas and extending the road network for increased ease of public access. It is doubtful today if anyone vested to look after what is Australia’s first national park, scientifically trained or not, would think that clearing of the “useless underscrub” ...to replace it with nutritious and ornamental grasses. And despite the assertion that no axeman would clear the majestic trees, the trustees were quite happy in the 1920s to “enter into an agreement with the Metropolitan Coal Company at Helensburgh Coal mine operators for the removal of 1200 acres of its most magnificent forest glades.” (The Sydney Morning Herald, Sept 16, 1922). The fate of all trees over 2 feet diameter was to be pit props for the mine. timber pit mine props. Income was the driver to prop up opening more of the park. After a newspaper campaign criticising the actions of the Trustees, these logging concessions were soon terminated.

The lower causeway at Audley was built very early in the life of the national park not just to provide access to its eastern portions but to help “acclimatise” introduced trout and swans to make the area more English-like. Thankfully the native eels made short work of the cygnets and the trout “retreated” to the upper sections of Kangaroo Creek. That We may well publish a more substantive article in the future on the practices of Acclimatisation Societies to NOT apply scientific principles in actually introducing exotic plants and animals to native ecosystems in the area. Current management dilemmas have in fact led to decisions to retain some exotic trees such as Plane Trees as a nod to the past...a culturally-based, some would say, counter-intuitive action in view of how strongly NPWS has opposed the presence of introduced horses in Kosciusko National Park.

As the decades rolled on the Royal Zoological Society’s activities in the Park became more oriented towards scientific research and to finding what would not have a harmful impact on the environment. A cottage at Gundamaian was used for scientific purposes by the Society until 1932. In 1924 a hut known as ‘The Scientist’s Cabin’ was built near the Upper Causeway in the southern part of the Park and the Society was granted sole use in 1932 when their Gundamaian licence was revoked. The Society was given notice to quit the Cabin in 1935 but continued to use it until 1941. A report on its activities there, published in the Proceedings of the Royal Zoological Society in August 1938, shows how this facility was used for scientific study, bird-watching and the education of local students and overseas visitors by means of outings to the area. A particular focus was given to study of the life history of the Satin Bower-bird and observations of its habit of painting its play-arbour with vegetable dye. The study was published in overseas journals attracting worldwide interest. The Society also reported to the Trust on the status of other birds such as the Lyre Bird. The Cabin was abandoned during World War II following vandalism; its use was thereafter discontinued. But scientists of many disciplines have since created a great body of studies that taken Royal National Park from a shaky science-based

beginning to being one of the most studied natural areas in Australia close to a large city. We trust you enjoy the articles that follow based on scientific involvement by some of our Branch members, and urge you to get involved as the emerging movement of citizen scientists will no doubt give you an opportunity to contribute to our scientific knowledge of Royal and other local National Parks.



At the Bird Cabin, (Scientists' Cabin), National Park, Sydney early 1930s: Alec Chisholm (noted bird watcher) seated third from left), New South Wales Governor Sir Philip Game (standing. Second from left) and Lady Gwendolen Game (kneeling). Mitchell Library, PXA 1772, Box 6



Ornithologists at the "National Park Cabin" NSW in 1926, with friends from Victoria and South Australia visiting Sydney for the Royal Australian Ornithological Union Congress. Alec H. Chisholm is on the far right of the back row.

## The Zoologists Hut in the Royal National Park

Greg Jackson, Pam Forbes

Archaeology is mostly half-truths and lies said with conviction. Anon.

### Introduction

At the southern end of the Royal National Park a small cabin, variously called the 'Zoologists Hut', the 'Scientists Hut' or the 'Bird Hut', was built in 1924 as the field station for professional and amateur scientists working on the park's flora and fauna.<sup>1</sup> The hut disappeared during WW II.<sup>2</sup> This article looks at its history and its remains.

### History of the Acclimatisation Society

The Acclimatisation Society was founded in France in 1854 and was inaugurated in NSW in 1861.<sup>3</sup> This society had the stated aim of introducing and acclimatising foreign species into overseas countries including the Royal National Park in NSW. The Park Trustees actively encouraged their efforts. An article entitled The Acclimatisation Society and the Royal National Park has appeared in this Bulletin.<sup>4</sup> In 1879 The Acclimatisation Society changed its name to the Zoological Society (later the Royal Zoological Society) and gradually changed its aims from introducing ecological disastrous and dangerous species into NSW and adopted a mission to study and conserve Australia's unique native fauna.<sup>5,6</sup> Initially a cottage at Gundamaian on the banks of the Hacking River, was built by the Park trustees and used for scientific purposes by the Society until 1932 when they were expelled for "inappropriate behaviour". This cottage, since destroyed, is shown in Image 1.<sup>7</sup>



Image 1: Gundamaian cottage. Erected in 1906 and destroyed by fire in September 1961 - photo 1937.<sup>7</sup>

In 1924 a hut known as the 'Zoologists Hut' was built near the confluence of the Hacking River and Waterfall Creek, not far from McKell Avenue. This hut, shown in Image 2 and 3, was given by the park trustees for the exclusive use of the society.<sup>8</sup> In 1935 the Society was given notice to quit this hut but continued to use it until 1941. Visitors to the hut used it as a base for scientific studies, birdwatching and the education of local students and overseas visitors. Groundbreaking research was conducted into the habits of the satin bowerbird and these studies were published

in overseas journals attracting worldwide interest. The Society also reported to the Trust on the status of other birds such as the Lyre Bird. The hut met an ignominious end. During WW2, with the hut unused, a series of raids by thieves stole much of the huts furniture and fabric, including locks, weatherboards, and windows, as a result, it was abandoned with plans to construct a more permanent building when the war was over.<sup>2</sup> Given the nature of the items stolen likely culprits would be the owners of the nearby coastal shacks at Garie, Era and Burning Palms looking to improve their shacks during a time when the availability of building material was limited by the war.



Image 2: The Zoologists Hut (AKA 'The Scientists Hut' and 'The Bird Hut') built in 1924 and destroyed in 1943. Note the car on the extreme right. Photo unknown date.<sup>8</sup>

### **The Hut**

Not much is known about the hut. It consisted of 2 rooms of unknown size. Images 2 and 3 suggest weatherboard construction on stone piers with a galvanised steel roof with a fireplace to provide warmth and cooking facilities. It is located only 20m from idyllic, perennial Waterfall Creek which would have provided drinking and washing water. Its visitors would probably have been troubled by mosquitoes and leeches (modern archaeologists certainly were) but its location in a mature rainforest on the edge of a clearing would be ideal for ornithological investigations. Image 6 shows its location.



(Newspaper caption reads) The State Governor (Sir Philip Game) at the Bird Hut in National Park

His Excellency spent the weekend with a party of scouts and other bird-lovers and participated in several tramps through the bush observing the habits of native birds. In the above picture his excellency is sitting near the edge of the veranda at the bird hut.

Image 3: The NSW Governor at the Zoologists Hut 1931.9



Image 4: One of the three huts' stone footings located with a large bolt and a small piece of thin window glass. Photo G. Jackson



Image 5: Rocks at Nth end of hut. Possible chimney and fireplace tumble Photo G. Jackson

### Archaeological Evidence



The hut was built just after the sawmill's closure and on the site of the sawmill.<sup>11</sup> There would be a considerable amount of building material, especially timber, about, indeed the hut may have been a reused sawmill building.

Not much is left of the Scientists Hut. The remains of three of its stone footings, approximately 400 x 400 mm, were located and one is shown in Image 4. These footings, which are visible in Image 2 form a right-angle triangle but are not sufficient to determine the size or orientation of the hut. They are undressed sandstone blocs roughly rectangular. A small piece of window glass, 1mm thick, was located along with a large ferrous bolt and is also shown in Image 4. These items may have come from sawmill buildings. A tumble of rock, shown in Image 5, at the northern end of the hut site is the probable remains of the fireplace and the chimney which is also visible in Image 2. An excavation would undoubtedly uncover more features and artifacts.

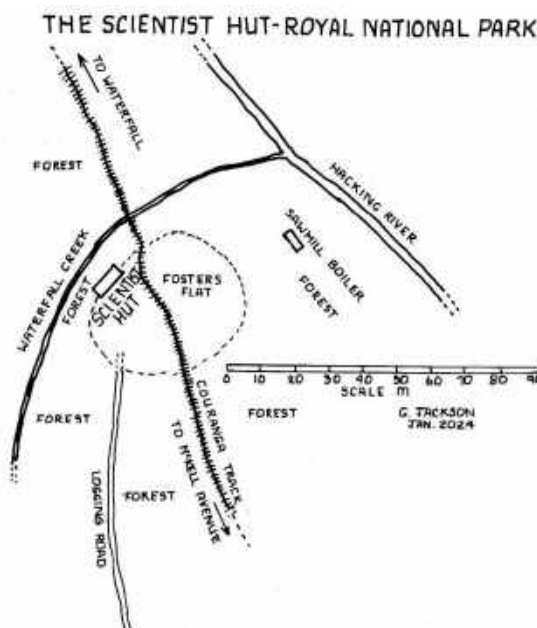


Image 6: site plan of Fosters Flat.

## Conclusion

Although little remains this hut was once an important scientific research station providing valuable data about our unique bird life. It existed at a time when the Royal National Park Trustees considered it more than a place for recreation but also a research institution that actively encouraged citizen scientists to study nature.

The authors would like to thank National Park Association members John Arnie, Gary Schoer and Ken Griffin for their help in locating the hut remains and sharing their research on its history.

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[https://dictionaryofsydney.org/organisation/royal\\_zoological\\_society\\_of\\_new\\_south\\_wales](https://dictionaryofsydney.org/organisation/royal_zoological_society_of_new_south_wales)
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7. Image RNP079, Gundamaian Cottage. Erected in 1906 and destroyed by fire in September 1961 – photo taken in 1937. From the Howard Stanley Collection\*.
8. Image RNP068, Scientists Cabin (Hut). Erected in 1924 and destroyed by vandalism in 1943. From the Howard Stanley Collection\*.
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10. NSW Parks and Wildlife Service, Couranga Walking Track  
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[https://www.academia.edu/45022654/Logging\\_in\\_the\\_Royal\\_National\\_Park](https://www.academia.edu/45022654/Logging_in_the_Royal_National_Park)

\* The Howard Stanley Collection: This is a collection of around 90 black and white photographs of the Royal National Park taken between 1885 and 1975. The originals are held at the Royal National Park office. A digital copy is held at the Sutherland Shire Historical Societies Museum, Venetia Street, Sylvania and in the Local Studies Collection, Sutherland Library.

Who was Howard Stanley? Howard James Stanley was a career public servant starting as a junior clerk in the Police Department around 1930 and retiring as Assistant Director National Parks and Wildlife Service in 1971.

## Crossing Creeks Safely and in Comfort



Many years ago, after a night of heavy rain, a friend of mine and I packed up our sodden tents, flung our full packs onto our shoulders and began the long climb up out of Blue Gum Forest to Govetts Leap. Ordinarily, this is a pleasant romp along the flat before a steady climb up through the rainforest, a walk in front of the final waterfall and the last slog up the face of the cliff to the top. Not on this occasion. We encountered numerous fast flowing creeks where none had existed and some were well over knee-deep. In trepidation I arrived at that last waterfall, only to discover that there was not a worry in the world. The amount of rain was such that it was pouring over the cliff so far beyond the track that we could walk underneath it and still have a 10 metre gap between body and deluge!

So how did we manage it!

For shallow water, just plunge in. Walking poles allow you to feel the depth of the water and steady you in the event that there is some object below that might throw you off balance. Some people like to take off their shoes to keep them dry. OK, that's fine. But beware that our feet are used to being in footwear and are rather soft and tender. The experienced on long walks where creek crossings are known to occur might carry water booties to slip on for those crossings. They can be bought at most dive shops. If without such an item, the best thing to do is carry a pair of woollen socks. Amazingly, they give grip on wet, slippery rocks much more effectively than bare feet. They also cushion you from sharp rocks!

But, whatever you do, it is not wise to risk a fall and a broken ankle just to keep your shoes from getting wet!

So, a confession! For those who used to come on my many full pack exploratory walks in the dark distant past, I used to find a place where it was impossible not to get wet! I preferred that everyone just had wet feet than that I faced an emergency of someone doing serious damage to their body!

While on getting shoes wet, don't be fooled by "waterproof" boots. If the water is above boot height, waterproof boots actually keep the water IN!

But what about crossing creeks, rivers or inlets under more extreme conditions of flood?

If in doubt, DON'T! Just find a dry spot and "camp". Full pack walkers will be prepared. Even day walkers should carry something that might make them comfortable, or, if not really comfortable, at least less miserable. A miserable walker, out overnight because of a flooded stream is a damn side better than a drowned one!

But, if strong, capable and brave, there are a few other tricks. My friend and I navigated our way through those fast flowing creeks by locking our arms together and using each other's strength to ensure we stayed on our feet and not fall into the water. We could also have used strong logs to hold onto as we crossed. If we had fallen, that log would have been a buoyancy device.

Mostly these conditions don't arise but they can. They can especially arise if walking in the west coast of New Zealand, in Tasmania and in many parts of Europe.

But don't let bad weather stop you enjoying the bush! Those are the walks that stay in your memory forever and remember that there is no such thing as bad weather, only badly prepared bushwalkers

Brian Everingham



Photo courtesy Dave Noble

## Walking Alone in the Bush

**Brian Everingham**

Walking alone in the bush can be dangerous. We have been warned many times that it is risky. What if we fell and hurt ourselves? What if we get lost? What if we meet some deranged stranger just waiting for someone stupid enough to walk by? Well, yes, except for that hypothetical fall, I can truly discount most of those fears. The fall, too, does not really worry me, despite my damaged knee. It has happened before and I am still here.

But, still, walking alone can be dangerous! You see, when walking alone one walks in silence, no longer thinking of the rest of the party, no longer concerned that everyone is having a good time and no longer looking over my shoulder to see if the straggler is within sight. It is seductive.

Despite rumours to the contrary, I actually like being alone. I actually like the silence. I love it when the only sounds I hear are of the wind, the rain, the birds and the quiet escape of some animal which sensed my presence and eased itself into the bush to escape detection.

But herein is the danger! You see, in that state a mind is left to wander and out of that state comes my most fruitful times. So many projects have arisen after a walk alone and that requires work to bring them from idea to fruition.

Try it. Walk alone. Walk in silence. You'll return energised, uplifted, charged with ideas. But be warned. If you are a sloth, you will be most upset that you went on that walk. It truly is a dangerous pursuit.



**Coast Watchers**  
**Brian Everingham**



Come and join us! Use that membership of yours and thrill to the world about us!