

Friends of the Ocean Grove Nature Reserve

History 1968 - 2016



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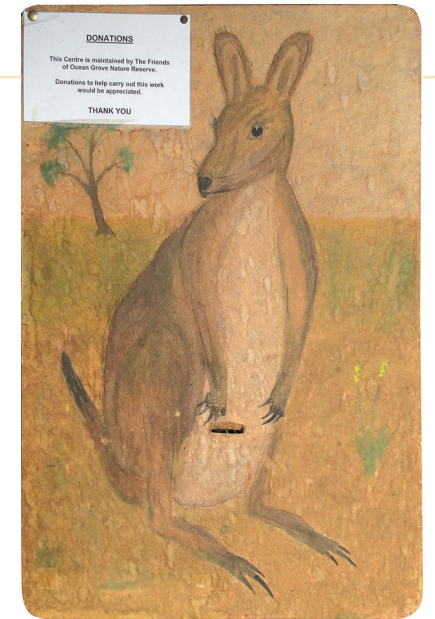
Friends of the Ocean Grove Nature Reserve gratefully acknowledge the support of the Victorian Government and Public Record Office Victoria for making this project possible.



Introduction

The history of the Ocean Grove Nature Reserve is the story of a special place and the passionate people who fought for the creation and protection of this natural haven. The story is told by many different voices, from the past and present, each with their own vision and reasons for being involved with the Reserve.

From the initial pioneers who enabled the establishment of the Reserve through to the current Friends Group, their collective voices and actions have shaped the Reserve and the results can be seen in the legacy they have preserved. We have tried to tell the story using the voices of those who were there at the time. While it is impossible to tell the story of everyone who was part of the history, we would like to say a huge thank you to all involved for conserving the Reserve for the enjoyment and benefit for us now and into the future.



The fundraising kangaroo has greeted generations of people visiting the Reserve. Many have happily donated their spare change in support of the Friends Group efforts. It has become weathered over time but still takes pride of place at the door to the information centre.

Aboriginal heritage

The Wathaurong people were the early inhabitants of this land. The numerous clans that made up this group extended around the bay from the Werribee River to Lorne, and inland as far as Ballarat.

They moved around in search of food, water and shelter and had an intimate knowledge of the land in which they lived. They respected the rich harvest that was gained from the flora and fauna of this region.

Prior to European settlement, the vegetation consisted of open grassy woodland with scattered sheoaks, gums and Silver Banksia, with spear-grass and Kangaroo Grass. The Wathaurong used fire to control the vegetation and

to maintain the open grassland, which was so important to their way of life. They harvested the plants and hunted for the native animals that thrived in this environment.

European settlement began in the early 1800s and with it came devastation for the aboriginal population. The early pioneers were seeking the grassland the Peninsula provided for their large flocks of sheep.

However these animals destroyed the root crops and grasslands, a staple food source of the aboriginal diet. The explorers and settlers also brought with them diseases that were fatal to the indigenous inhabitants.

Early European history of the Bellarine and Ocean Grove

The Bellarine Peninsula was explored and settlement began in the late 1830s. The Victorian gold rush of the 1850s brought speculators and settlers to Australia and when the hunt for gold dwindled, these people started to look for permanent settlement. The Bellarine was opening up and the fertile land of this area was a popular destination. Subdivisions were established in the 1850s.

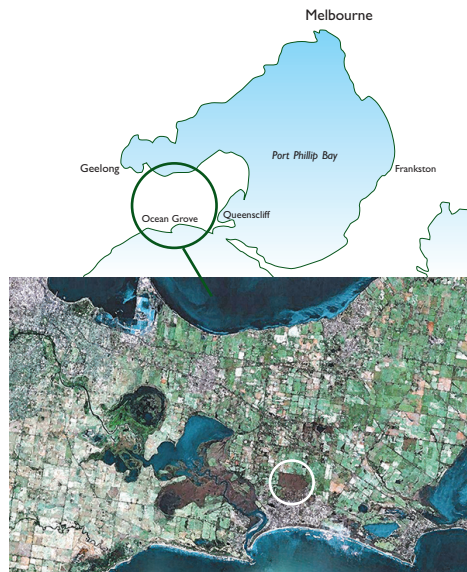
In 1854, Mr William Bonsey tried to establish an estate called Kingston-on-the-Sea, in what was to become Ocean Grove. However this proved to be a failure and the Bank of New South Wales acquired ownership of a section of this subdivision. Mr William Harding and later the Blackwell family also purchased land in the area. For the next 20 – 30 years the land was used for grazing and the harvesting of wattle bark. This was a valuable commodity. The tannin obtained was used in the tanning of leather, a material widely used at this time.

In 1887, leading members of the Methodist Church purchased over 500 acres and called the site Ocean Grove after a similar religious settlement in New Jersey, USA. They sold this settlement to a syndicate, who divided it into 2,500 blocks, which were offered for sale. The Methodist Church had put a covenant on this land which prevented the making or selling of alcoholic beverages. This community was promoted as “a place of rest for people tired of city, town and county life, a healthful residence right in full view of the ocean, a resort for people fond of piscatorial pursuits, aquatic men, and persons who take a delight in spending their holiday in sport with gun and dog”.

In keeping with the temperance ideals of the Methodist Church, a Coffee Palace was erected in 1888. Churches were established and a Post Office was built. More guest houses opened and tents turned into wooden houses. Cobb & Co stage coaches

offered a service from Geelong and trains ran to the new Ocean Grove Station out of town (later to be known as Marcus Hill Station).

In 1890, the syndicate handed over land to the Council to facilitate road making for easier access to the developing town and the grubbed road was formed and metalled (still known as Grubb Rd). Work continued and the town grew to the busy holiday and residential centre that it is today.



The Cuthbertson family

In the late 1850s, land to the north of what was to become Ocean Grove was purchased by William Hudson, who had other extensive properties in Belmont, Geelong business district, Barwon Heads and Connewarre. Soon after this purchase Hudson lost most of his wealth and died in 1859.

After Hudson's death, his wife Jane Eleanor (nee Ryder) moved to the Ocean Grove property and called it “Woodlands”. The address was 21 Hillson and it was set in uncleared bushland with an entrance from Egglestone St. / Thacker St. and later Grubb Rd. Most of the original bush cover remained intact with the exception of a few hectares cleared to build a dwelling and to rest the Cobb & Co. horses which provided transport from Geelong to the coast.

John Cuthbertson arrived in Melbourne in 1855 and soon moved to Geelong where he established a grocery shop. In 1860, Mrs Jane Hudson, the widow of William Hudson, married John Cuthbertson and they continued to live at “Woodlands”. Beyond the one square mile known as “Woodlands”, the property also extended westward to what would become the “Bellview” estate and included land that would eventually become the “Blue Waters” estate. This land was used as a vineyard and orchard. Jane and William Hudson had one daughter and the family grew with Jane's marriage to John Cuthbertson, as they had a further nine children. Two of these children were Florence (born 1874) and Beatrice (born 1878).

The early Bellarine Peninsula was an open, eucalypt woodland as a result of the regular burning by the Aboriginal inhabitants. For 100 years, from the 1850s to the 1950s, tan bark stripping of the Golden Wattles continued. Firewood was felled and removed. Some clearing had been done around the homestead and grass-trees had been harvested and sold in Geelong. For a

5 year period the property was leased and used to graze sheep. No fires had occurred there in the memory of the older residents of the district. Apart from a tornado which ripped through the area in 1934 flattening a swathe about 100 metres wide, the bushland remained largely intact and a living example of what the Bellarine Peninsula had been long before European settlement.

This property was eventually inherited by John and Jane Cuthbertson's younger daughters, Florence and Beatrice, who had never married. By the late 1950s, the two single ladies were forced by advancing age to move from the property. Much of the original land had been sold. However the one square mile known as “Woodlands” remained. The Miss Cuthbertsons requested that their property be left in its natural state and it was put on the market in the early 1960s.



Wattle bark industry

In the mid to late 1800s the wattle bark industry flourished on the Bellarine Peninsula. The wattle bark was used as a source of tannin for leather tanning with large amounts of bark regularly being shipped from Geelong. Large stands of acacia were planted throughout the peninsula; *Acacia pycnantha* (Golden Wattle) became common in this area.

Gordon Mc Carthy, longterm contributor to the development of the Reserve, remembers a couple of young lads who harvested the wattle during the 1960s. “When Eric and his brother turned 14 his father gave him an axe and said ‘Go on Tiger! Go make your living!’”

The Establishment of the Reserve

On 22nd October 1962 the Mayor of Geelong, Mr. Ranald McAllister, with Victorian Government representatives in support, called a public meeting with the intention of forming a committee. The purpose of the committee would be to raise funds to purchase the Cuthbertson property.

This attracted the interest of the Geelong Field Naturalists Club (GFNC), and in particular, its President, the late Jack Wheeler. Following the meeting, Jack initiated a plan to purchase the area to reserve it as a national park. The area of virgin bush, known locally as Cuthbertson's Paddock, had long been an area favoured for bird watching and botany. This group and other interested parties formed the first committee for the Ocean Grove Nature Reserve. This committee was charged with the task of raising £10,000 – being the asking price of £54 per acre.

Called the Bellarine National Park Appeal, the fund raising committee included representatives from the City of Geelong, the Bellarine Shire Council, the Borough of Queenscliffe, Victorian Field Naturalists Club, Native Plant Preservation Society and Bird Observers Club. State Treasury matched donations on a one-to-one basis, but with a set limit.

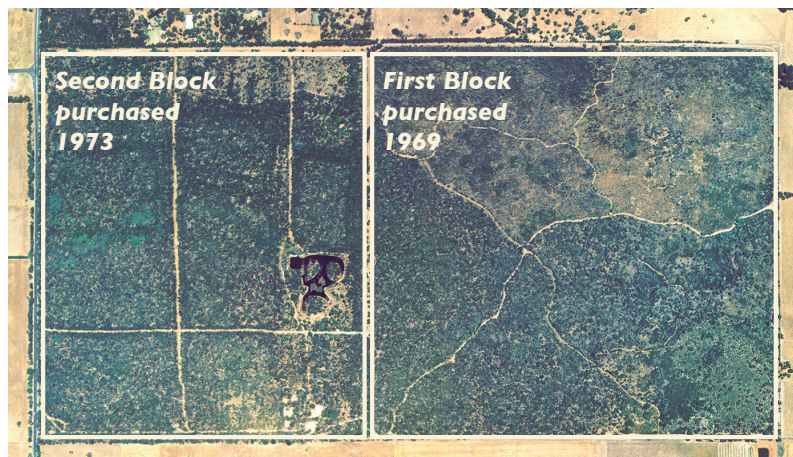
Despite its best efforts the Committee was only able to raise sufficient funds to purchase a quarter of the original square mile. This was not sufficient to qualify as a national park, but enough to become a nature reserve. Just over 80 hectares was selected from the north-west portion along with an access track from Grubb Rd., and the purchase was finalised.

The area purchased included the grass-tree stand and in this area could be found bandicoots, gliders, Echidnas, phascogales, bats, Dunnarts, and transient

Koalas. Reptiles included Tree Dragons, Blue-tongued Lizards and small skinks. Over 100 species of resident and migratory birds had been recorded including Bush Stone-curlews, whistlers, robins, cuckoos, flycatchers, wrens, finches and even a nesting pair of Wedge-tailed Eagles.

This area of 81 hectares (approx. half of "Woodlands") was gazetted as Crown Land on 5th January 1968 under the control of the Department of Crown Lands and Survey. A Committee of Management was formed. The inaugural meeting of the Ocean Grove Nature Reserve Committee of Management was held at the Bellarine Shire Offices in Drysdale on 17th May 1968. This committee included representatives from the Geelong Field Naturalists Club, two councillors from the Bellarine Shire, one from the Borough of Queenscliffe, the Lands Officer, a Member of Parliament and two members of the public.

Jack Wheeler led the fund raising committee and was elected as the first Chairman of the Committee of Management. Trevor Pescott was elected as secretary. Jack Wheeler proved to be a very valuable member, both of the Committee and through his work for the Reserve. Trevor Pescott likewise remained on the Committee until 1991 and has been a long term member of the Friends Group.



Gordon Mc Carthy talking to Barry Lingham about Jack Wheeler and the OGNR. Extract from interview, 2014.

What were your earliest memories of the Reserve? - Barry

It was a beautiful bit of bush and hadn't been burnt in living memory. The whole area used to be a lovely bit of bush. The grammar school used to own where Mitre 10 is now. When the Cuthbertson block came up for sale, we aimed to buy the square mile but it wasn't meant to be. When the eastern block was back in the market a few years later, Jack Wheeler who was the Dairy Supervisor to the Bellarine, ran another appeal so we got to buy the second block. There were no kangaroos or wallabies in the early days. Judy and John Bailey used to look after kangaroos and she let quite a few wallabies go in there. Originally there weren't any. The Red-necked Wallaby population seems to have died out. We may get roos coming into the Reserve from Swan Bay, given the population there.

What do you remember about Jack Wheeler and the Reserve? - Barry

Jack had a good personality about him. He knew a lot of people, people in high places. He was involved in the animal hospital and managed to involve lots of school kids and guides. There were always kids around in those days. His philosophy was 'leave things alone and let it look after itself'.

Jack was keen on planting native trees but not necessarily indigenous. As long as it brought birds in, it was ok.

How did the fence get built? - Barry

Jack Wheeler got the fence done. Don't know how he did it. Bit of a law unto himself. He would organise people. He got all the wetland done too – he would get farmers or someone to come in with their equipment, then it was just done. Like the little bird hide on the North Track - Jack used to get that filled. They used to cart water round to farms and he used to get the water carrier to fill up the waterhole. He had all sorts of little things going on. He was very persuasive Jack. They (committee) could get things done. His name should be perpetuated in there somewhere.

It's an amazing place - Barry

We're lucky to have it actually - Gordon

Gordon Mc Carthy and Barry Lingham.



The establishment of the Ocean Grove Nature Reserve formed part of a broader movement that began in the 1970s to protect areas of bush within Australia which could act as a resource for the future. Their value lay in what they could offer future generations as well as a safe place for important threatened or notable plants and animals. This trend was reflected in the volume of native animals and plants released into the Reserve by both the Committee of Management and other local community members or wildlife shelters. The concept of preserving indigenous flora and fauna by not introducing species from other areas did not prevail until the late 1990s.

Committee of Management, 1968 - 1996

Developments under the inaugural Committee of Management

The role of the Committee of Management was to oversee all aspects of the Reserve, including fencing and facilities upkeep, as well as decisions regarding flora and fauna. Working bees were organised and many projects undertaken.

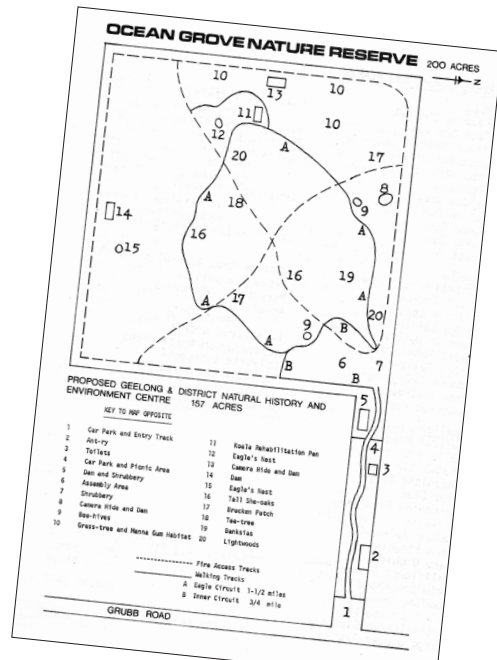
As with most community groups, many of the people forming the Committee not only dealt with administrative functions, but became the hands-on workers. Friends, family, local community members and experts in various fields were encouraged to volunteer their time and manpower. In 1968, it was decided to grow a native garden using plants from the Bellarine Peninsula. A site which had been cleared of Furze Weed (Gorse or Ulex europeas), just east of the present Information Centre, was selected as the site for the native garden and the following year a visitor information brochure was prepared.

Other projects included such works as the creation of an all-weather access road with culverts plus two car parks, fire access and fire-break tracks. Three dams and a waterhole were constructed and 10 kilometres of walking tracks were surveyed and commenced, along with rabbit proof boundary fencing, weed eradication, rabbit trapping and the clearing of excess timber (the wood was sold as a fund raiser). Native tree planting was carried out with



the assistance of the Society for Growing Australian Plants. An entrance gate and sign was constructed and installed.

Following an enormous amount of effort by all involved, in 1971 the Ocean Grove Nature Reserve was opened to the public. Many schools in the area had already enjoyed educational excursions through the Reserve prior to its official opening. In April of this year, the group hosted a visit from the Minister of Lands, Mr Borthwick. Jack Wheeler accompanied Mr Borthwick when he inspected the Reserve.



Nitidus Ant colony project

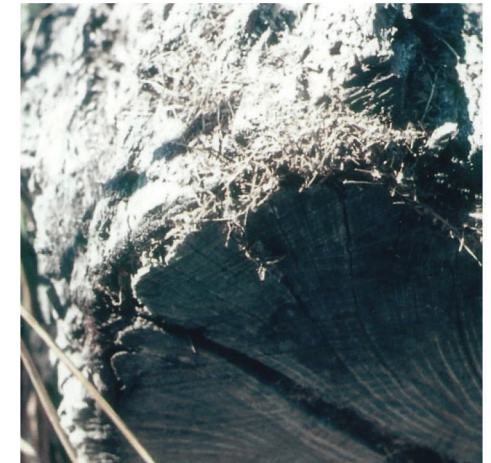
The Coconut Ant *Papyrius nitidus* is named from the strong odour of 'desiccated coconut' that presents when one of these ants is crushed. This species acts as a protective host for the larval stage of the Small Ant-blue Butterfly *Acrodipous myrmecophila*. Historically, the butterfly was first found on Cuthbertson's property (now Ocean Grove Nature Reserve) by Dr G.A Waterhouse in 1912, but it is now only found at Broadford in Victoria and is locally extinct. In 1971, a fence was constructed around the *Nitidus* Ant colony in the north of the Reserve in the hope that the Small Ant-blue may return.

The significance of the role that the ant played in the life cycle of the butterfly is best described by Waterhouse in 1932.....

"The eggs are usually laid at the base of a small plant of one of the common wattles.I believe that at first the small larvae are carried by the ants to the tender young shoots. When older they certainly crawl to their food, being guided by the ants.....they are led back home to the ant-byre at the base of the plant. They feed only in the evening and at night.....Should a larva, when on its outward or homeward journey, go in the wrong direction, an ant will come and give its head a push in the direction it should go. The ants tend these larvae with great care, and in return, provide with glands on their back, a honey-like fluid much prized by the ants....."



Nitidus Ant colony.



A Second Chance at the Grove

by Trevor Pescott The Geelong Advertiser, Thursday February 15, 1973.

Very rarely are conservationists given a second chance to preserve an area from destruction yet this is precisely what has happened at the Ocean Grove Nature Reserve.

More than simply a second chance to save an area, we have the opportunity to see developed adjacent to the existing reserve, a magnificent natural history and environment centre.

The story began about 12 years ago when Geelong had the chance to gain a priceless asset, a piece of our heritage, a square mile bushland near Ocean Grove; unique in its historical aura that lay over it - it promised to be a reserve of which we could, as a city, be proud.

But the conservation movement was immature, lacking the support that it has today despite the nominal price asked we could raise only enough finance to buy 200 acres, and then only with generous support from the Bellarine Shire Council and the State Government.

In 1964, the land was acquired and a

committee of management established to manage and develop the area known now as the Ocean Grove Nature Reserve. The committee worked hard, and managed to have the reserve fenced, walking and fire access tracks laid out, dams sunk, a picnic area developed, trees planted, a colony of ants fenced (they played 'host' to a rare butterfly and must be preserved). We have received a grant to have a toilet block.

The committee has had a great deal of assistance in getting work done - voluntary help from amateur organizations including the Geelong Field Naturalist Club, Society for Growing Australian Plants, Ocean Grove Apex and others, and assistance of immeasurable dimension from the Bellarine Shire Council.

Last year, the owners of the balance of the original square mile decided to subdivide and sell. The Ocean Grove Nature Reserve Committee took option on 157 acres, for the land between the existing reserve and Grubb Road is superbly situated for the setting up of a centre described below.

But money must be raised - \$80,000 is needed to buy the land and time is short; an appeal has been launched, and I hope that all who support the principles of conservation will show their concern by subscribing generously to swell the already growing list of donations.

Given the land, the committee will develop a centre more advanced than any other project so far instituted.

The first stage is to lay out nature gardens in such a way that visitors will find splendid displays of Australian plants grouped to show their diversity and extent of each genus or family of plants; this is planned to cover many acres of land that have been cleared and grazed - it is a reforestation project as well as a garden.

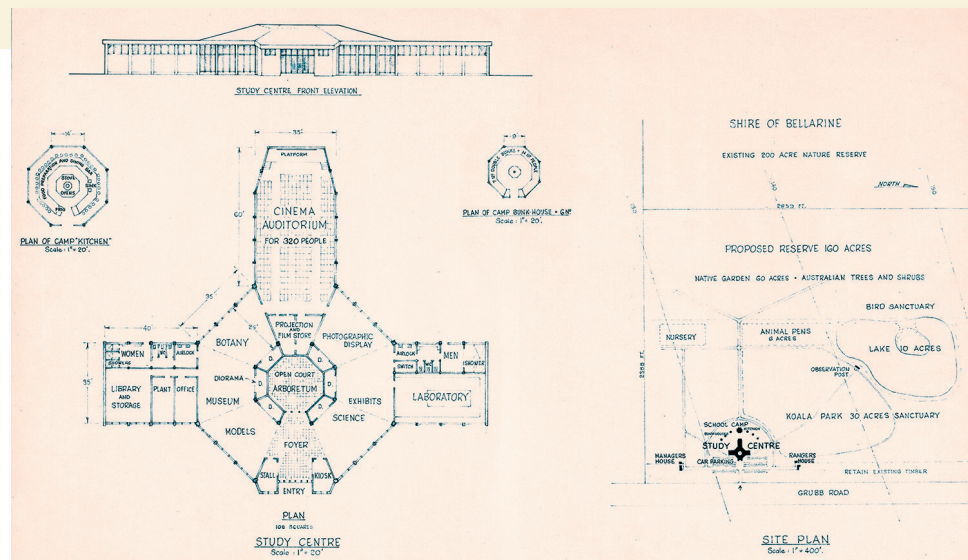
A lake will be established and rare water birds will be encouraged to breed there; concealed observation points will be built to allow visitors the chance to see and photograph the birds.

A walk-through enclosure encompassing 30 acres will feature koalas and other native fauna in natural conditions.

In stage two, a building will be erected containing theatre, laboratory, meeting and study rooms, display areas and herbarium; one feature of the building will be facilities to treat and rehabilitate injured and oiled birds and animals.

Lastly, a school camp will be built, this being available for local and distant schools, for a day or longer - up to a week - visits.

The plan is bold, futuristic and thoroughly desirable - and it will succeed if Geelong supports it as it deserves.



Acquisition of second block

Works were progressing well. The regulations for the management of the Reserve were gazetted in May 1972. A submission was made to the State Government regarding the acquisition of a further 62 hectares that was known as Fowlers' Block and was adjacent to the eastern side of the Reserve. The cost for this extra acreage was put at \$70,650.00, as appraised by the Valuer-General's Office.

The following year a fund-raising appeal was launched called the Geelong and District Natural History and Environment Centre Appeal to purchase this property. Thanks to public donations, the M.A. Ingram Trust and funding assistance from both the State Government (4:1 matching grant) and the Shire of Bellarine, this second block was secured in 1973. It was gazetted as Public Land on 23rd January 1974 for Permanent Nature Park and Environment Study Centre and the Regulations for the Management of this second block were gazetted on 28th August of that year. This acquisition increased the size of the Reserve to 143 hectares.

Construction of the waterfowl habitat

In 1976 an appeal was launched to establish a waterfowl habitat. Sufficient funds were raised and plans were made.

In April 1978 a major clearance of regenerated small Golden Wattles was carried out. The organisers were very grateful for the assistance of Cyril Ham and his tractor to carry out the felling. The trees were then transported by rear-end rakes to a site ready for mulching. This provided a cleared area ready for topsoil replacement as a first stage of the waterfowl habitat. Excavation work began and the habitat was completed by May of 1979 at a cost of \$8,500.



Birds avoid Reserve wetland

It comes as somewhat of a surprise to find to the Reserve to find an area of wetland half an acre amongst the banks and across the woodland not far from the Information Centre.

In a way, it may be expected, as it is a natural wetland, no stream flows through, and even as open as the area where the lake is located, it was once a grassy area used for residential development in the early 1970s. In the early 1970s, a small dam was constructed and the timber cleared and burned.

At this stage, the land was offered for sale, subsequently bought by the Victorian Government and attached to the existing Nature Reserve, to be used as a wetland.

The Committee of Management for the Reserve, as that was one of the first records, in no time the lake filled and overflowed - indeed urgent action was needed to prevent the retaining wall being eroded away.

But the birds did not appear. Indeed they showed very little interest at all. Over the years since, records show an occasional cormorant, a small flock of grey teal, a lone white-faced heron and a pair of Australian grebes and that is about the lot. In fact there are probably more theories as to the reason for the absence of birds than there are the birds themselves. Some ornithologists suggest that the concealing vegetation surrounding the lake is the cause; others point to the possible lack of food in the water.

Restricted open water may be a deterrent providing difficulties for the larger swans and pelicans, both of which require a certain space for landings and take off. Another theory held by some is that the lake has not been there long enough to be established in the genetic code or memory of the local or migrating birdlife.

The birds themselves probably know why they choose not to frequent the area, but so far they haven't communicated this to the current management.

Ray Hodge wrote 68 columns about the Reserve titled 'IN THE NATURE RESERVE', for The Whistler between 1997 - 2003

IN THE NATURE RESERVE FROM RAY HODGE

IN THE NATURE RESERVE FROM RAY HODGE

Birds avoid Reserve wetland

by Ray Hodge. Excerpt from The Whistler, November 2000.

A massive program of replanting with Australian native plants was undertaken and the provision of a man made lake and waterfowl habitat implemented.

Advice and direction was obtained from then Fisheries and Wildlife Department as the end result was an excavation of some hectares at varying depths, a retaining bank installed, islands strategically located to provide nesting security, feeder drains dredged to direct the flow of water from surrounding open farmland and walking tracks cleared to surround the whole complex.

All that was needed then was a supply of water to attract the anticipated flocks of waterbirds. Water was certainly forthcoming, as that year was one of the wettest on record. In no time the lake filled and overflowed - indeed urgent action was needed to prevent the retaining wall being eroded away.

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Ray Hodge wrote 68 columns about the Reserve titled 'IN THE NATURE RESERVE', for The Whistler between 1997 - 2003



Animal hospital

Early plans made provision for a full working animal hospital to be built on the site of the second block. During the 1970s many volunteers cared for injured animals in their homes before releasing them into the Reserve.

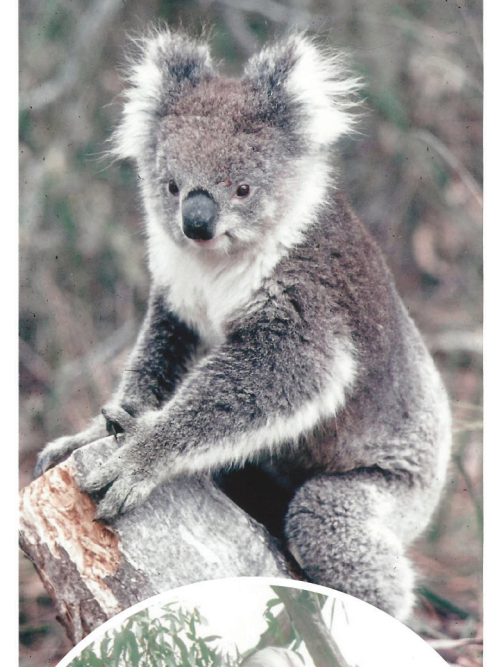
During 1972 three netted enclosures were erected to house sick, injured or orphaned Koalas, and the following year Fisheries and Wildlife released Koalas into the Reserve. Up to 1978, fifteen Koalas were treated and then released into the Reserve. Over the years many animals were released back into the nature reserve after recovering from injuries received through road accidents and bush fires.

The need for an animal shelter was met when Jirrahlinga Koala Wildlife Sanctuary was established in Barwon Heads in the early 1980s. Many of the animals that would have been brought to the Reserve were now cared for there. The building that was originally intended to be an animal hospital became the current information centre and the Koala enclosures were dismantled in 1986.

Story of Cuddles The Koala as told by Gordon Mc Carthy

Cuddles mother was killed out at Anakie and she was found clinging on. Fisheries and Wildlife gave her to Jack Wheeler who brought her to me. She weighed 31lbs when she came to our house. Couldn't climb or anything. We used to have a stump in the middle of the living room with a fur coat over it. She became a pet and used to play with our kids. She wouldn't wet on you, instead she used to come down to the floor and wet on some paper. When she got bigger she was released into the Manna Gum area of the Reserve. She still used to come down to me if I tapped on the tree and called her. Cuddles disappeared for six months. Then she came back one day and came down the tree to me after making sure no one else was around.

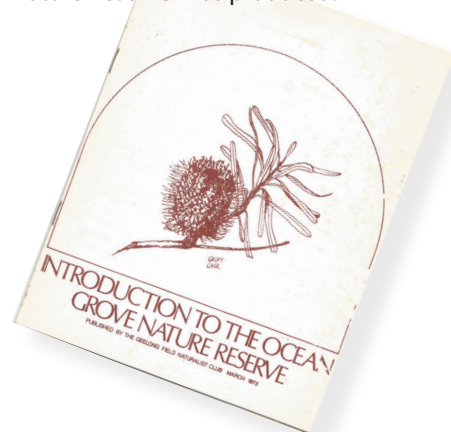
A male was released into the reserve and she eventually became pregnant. Well anyway it turned out she had a little one, but she still let me climb up into the tree with them. She was pretty bright.



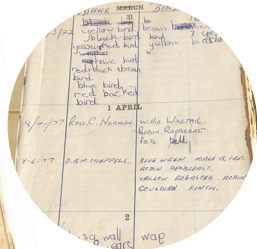
Gordon Mc Carthy with Cuddles the Koala.

Ongoing work during the 1970s

1974 proved to be a busy year at the Reserve. Water was laid on and toilets were installed for the convenience of all. Over 5000 school students, representing 58 schools visited the Reserve and a new booklet "Introduction to the Ocean Grove Nature Reserve" was produced.



On 1st September 1975 two wooden bird hides were built for observation and photography by Bellarine Shire Council. They were placed near the waterholes, one on the North Track and one on the South Track. The hides were 1.8m x 1.6m x 1.8m and made of treated pine with shutters, seats and bench space. The northern hide also had a wooden floor and in 1976 a log book was placed there for visitors to record the observations they made of the birds coming to the water. This log book was invaluable and formed the basis of future bird lists that would be produced at the Reserve.



In 1975 work also commenced on the first nature trail and eight seats were constructed and installed. The latter were made possible through public donations, including that from the Country Women's Association. Jack Wheeler was appointed as Bailiff by the Lands Department in 1975 and Ray Hodge was appointed as permanent Gould Representative. Bird and Plant lists were also prepared at this time

Building works continued with five BBQ's built and an area near the bus park set aside for hybrid plants. Work also commenced on the planting of shrubberies of native plants. This work would continue for years to come.

Reg Guyett retired from his position on the Committee of Management in 1977 and Jack Wheeler was awarded the Australian Natural History Medallion for his contributions to natural history. That same year it was noted that the native orchids in the Reserve were flourishing. 4814 adults and 3712 children visited the Reserve.

In April of 1977 an investigation commenced into the acquisition of a building to serve as a visitor centre at the Reserve. This led to the purchase of the first Information Centre building. The building was erected and renovations completed by the Apex Club of Ocean Grove.

Information Centre, 1981.



In 1978 a new edition of the "Introduction to the Ocean Grove Nature Reserve" was published. New fencing was completed, and although the Reserve had been hosting school children for some time, two Education Department officers visited to assess the Reserve for education purposes.



Wilber the wedge-tailed Eagle, a regular inhabitant.

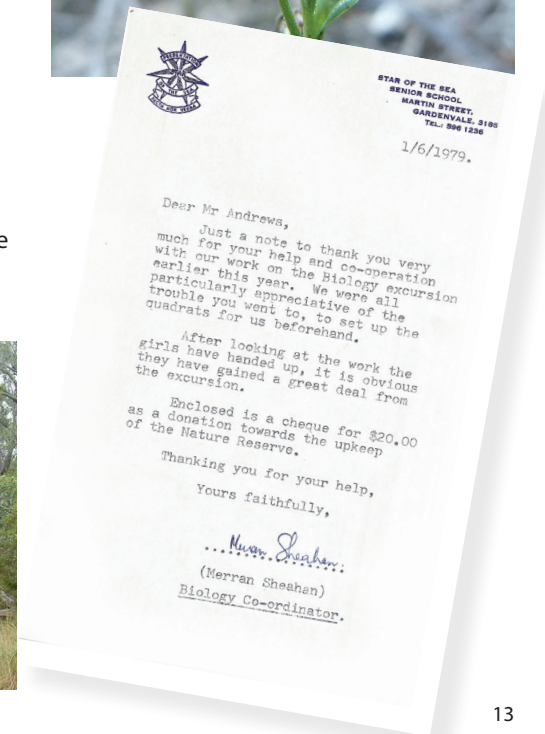
During this time bird observers were utilising the Reserve's natural habitat. It was reported that the area near the waterhole at the north boundary was particularly popular. The first complete bird list for the Reserve was published in 1978, listing 132 species. This list grew to 167 in later years. Each species was coded and extra information was added for the rarer finds. Much of this initial recording was the work of Roger Thomas and Jack Wheeler. Peter Cummins was another contributor from the late 1980s to the mid 1990s. Many others have since taken over the mantle.



Nature Reserve as an Ark

The Nature Reserve was often viewed as a safe place for preserving local flora and fauna. As Gordon McCarthy recalls orchids and other rare flora would often be transplanted into the Reserve.

Eric would find orchids under stress about to be bulldozed so he would dig them up and replant them in the Nature Reserve. Eric used to plant sun orchids, green hoods, spider orchids - different ones over the years.



The early 1980s

In 1978 the Drysdale Rotary Club offered to build and equip an animal hospital. Plans were made and in 1981, as part of their community service, the building was completed. However, what was originally intended as an animal shelter became an information centre, for the benefit of visitors to the Reserve and the wider community. (The animal shelter role was taken over by Jirrahlinga Koala Wildlife Sanctuary). Rotoract members continued to assist in the maintenance and repair of this building.

Improvements made by the group in the early 80s included the installation of a telephone and a power generator. A Management Plan for the Reserve was drafted. In spite of these improvements, volunteers were still in short supply and the Committee advertised in July of 1982 for urgent reinforcements to their band of willing workers.

A severe drought, that was a concern to the district during these years, caused a closure of the Reserve for a short period, due to a fear of bush fires. Even after re-opening, 'Closed' signs were created, ready for display and the Reserve continued to be closed on Total Fire Ban days. To reduce some of the risk the Committee purchased a second-hand land rover and a successful fuel reduction burn was completed around the south boundary of the eastern block. Although an earlier request for a Ranger to work at the Reserve had been denied,



in 1983 the Department of Crown Lands and Survey decided to assign a Ranger to assist at the Reserve for 12 months. However at the same time a request for an Education Officer was rejected by the Education Department. About this time the Committee of Management lost one of its most dedicated supporters with the death of Jack Wheeler. Jack had been a part of the Ocean Grove Nature Reserve from its beginning and his loss was felt by all.

The following year works were completed on the new building and the old information centre was demolished. Signage was replaced and the last pine tree on the property was removed. With the sometimes hazardous nature of the environment considered, a fire plan was also formulated. Finally, an Area Ranger was appointed with duties to include the Reserve.

With the threat of bushfires still paramount in the minds of the Committee, meetings with the CFA took place in 1986 to ensure there was a consensus regarding fuel reduction burns as necessary.

Memories of Ray Hodge

by Barry Lingham.

Ray Hodge contributed enormously to the successful management of the OGNR and also to the linking of the Ocean Grove community to this marvellous local asset.

Ray grew up on a farm near Heywood, close to native forests and wetlands which were home to abundant bird life and native animals, an ideal environment to foster a love of nature. In his teenage years he joined the Gould League and the Portland Field Naturalists Club.

Ray was further able to pursue his interest in the natural world when he was appointed Assistant Secretary to the Gould League in the Education Department. The job involved producing publications, displays and activities for schoolchildren in order to promote appreciation of birds and discourage the collecting of eggs. This perspective began to expand to focus on the broader protection of the environment so as to preserve habitat.

Ray had the skill to impart knowledge and enthusiasm to others, honed during his career as a local Primary School teacher at Leopold and Ocean Grove. The Committee of Management had only been running for four years when Ray joined the group, representing the Gould League. This began a commitment of time, labour and dedication that would last over three decades.

Ray developed his knowledge of the birds, plants and animals of the OGNR and shared this through regular nature columns in the local newspapers. The information helped to bring the OGNR and its wildlife to the attention of the local citizens.

Always a practical man, Ray was just as happy fixing potholes on the entrance track as he was in looking after his beloved old cars. He often drove to the OGNR in his immaculate Morris Minor.



Ray Hodge (left) & Brian Hart (right).

In the 1980s and 1990s, there was no money available to hire contractors, so the maintenance was carried out by volunteers – and Ray was the most active of the volunteers. Fixing fences, clearing fallen trees, mowing all the OGNR tracks with a “walk-behind” slasher, painting the Information Centre, weeding or planting, Ray was visiting the OGNR several times each week. On top of this, he regularly arranged working-bees where he coordinated other volunteers to help out with these tasks. Ray also organised the Information Centre volunteers for many years.

The OGNR was a popular excursion destination for school children and Ray, along with Dave King, regularly volunteered to show children the natural treasures of this bushland. Ray's enthusiasm was passed on to the children, some of whom still visit the OGNR today. Ray developed a presentation of slide photographs from the OGNR that he was able to show to many meetings of other local community groups or schools.

Ray was a key person in developing the original OGNR newsletter and when he took on the role of President of the Friends Group in 1997, he was able to use his extensive knowledge and persuasive powers to help build an energetic and successful organisation.

Ray's dedication was acknowledged by a Certificate of Appreciation in 1993 and later he was awarded Life Membership in 2001 for his services to the OGNR.

Rotary Club handover of the Information Centre, 1981.



Protection of Reserve, a community effort

The Geelong Field Naturalists continued to be active in the Reserve. Members volunteered to complete flora and fauna surveys, conduct tours, design the bird hides with the northern hide upgraded and a new hide built on the western dam, helped in the general working bees and at the Information Centre at the weekends. Other community assistance took the form of the Rotary Club constructing a bike track along Grubb Rd. to the entrance of the Reserve.

The work done by the Committee was all voluntary. Aside from the important administrative tasks they were responsible for, they also participated in track maintenance and mowing, fire prevention measures, rubbish removal, conducting school tours, signage, fund-raising, toilet cleaning, fencing and gate maintenance,

weed eradication, planting working bees, rosters, information centre displays, cutting wood for the BBQ's, to name but a few of their responsibilities. Although not on the Committee, there were several active volunteers who assisted with maintenance.

Work continued by this dedicated group and during the latter part of the 1980s aside from the routine maintenance of the property, they achieved such works as the purchase of a beehive, finalisation of the



naming of the tracks throughout the Reserve and upgrading of the pamphlet. Aerial photos were taken and maps updated and reprinted and nature walks were organised for the Ocean Grove Festival. Significantly, discussions regarding the formation of a Friends Group also began in the mid 1980s.

In spite of the dedication and constant progress within the Reserve, with 20 years gone since the purchase, the phascogales, bandicoots and the gliders had gone and the stone-curlews, robins and treecreepers and other birds were no longer reported. The vegetation had suffered over the years by deliberately lit fires, track clearing for fire breaks and the encroachment from pest plants and feral animals.



The Geelong Field Naturalists Club (GFNC) is a natural history and conservation society that was founded in 1961 by Trevor Pescott. The Geelong Field Naturalists and the Ocean Grove Nature Reserve have a shared history, beginning with Jack Wheeler (President of the GFNC) advocating for the establishment of the reserve in the early 1960s. The GFNC was involved with the Ocean Grove Committee of Management until the 1990s. Members of the GFNC have continued to conduct flora and fauna surveys and advocate for the Reserve. The GFNC logo features the Small Ant-blue butterfly, an endangered species that existed in the Reserve up until the mid 20th century.

Demands of being a volunteer

- DUTIES INVOLVED IN SUPERVISION :: OCEAN GROVE NATURE RESERVE.
1. The Reserve should be open to vehicle access from 10.30 AM to 4.30 PM. The warden should be present during this time.
 2. Set gate closing time on notice board at entrance. Unlock gates and information office.
 3. Clean toilets, picnic areas and information office.
 4. Read and record the rainfall figures.
 5. Inspect Reserve and note items in need of attention.
 6. Become familiar with the regulations and features of the Reserve.
 7. Be available to the public to offer information and direction. Interstate and overseas visitors invited to sign visitors' book. Record booking for Barbecue or group visits etc.
 8. Sell, and record sales of, Gould League and other publications.
 9. Record statistics of visitors, cars etc. Secure donations.
 10. Enter details of interest or importance in diary.
 11. Clean picnic area, extinguish fires if any.
 12. Lock information centre, gates, (check for cars) and set dial blank.

Managing the day to day running of the Reserve was a huge job. Maintaining the grounds, guiding school groups and liaising with the general public all took time and effort. Added to this was the decreasing number of volunteers and the lack of government assistance. The Committee made numerous requests for government assistance but to no avail. Looking at the duties the volunteers were asked to do, combined with the fact they had to provide all their own equipment makes us appreciate the huge amount of work and time they contributed. One volunteer offers his advice on the 'Regulations for the care, protection and management for the Ocean Grove Nature Reserve'.

".....make it important that the area is not left without supervision too long at any time it has to be watched very closely as the first thing many do when they arrive in the Reserve is to bring out the footballs, or cricket bat and ball depending on the time of year and become quite nasty when told that it is against regulations for the area."

Other problems encountered included people shooting rabbits in the Reserve, double booking of school groups, people leaving smoldering fires and the ongoing issues associated with maintenance of the reserve.

"Then there is the matter of tools, the work force has to supply their own tools as there is nothing supplied. In the event of discovering trees overhanging along the Drive or round the walking tracks we have to cart an extension ladder and climb up and clear the way, even to having to tie the ladder to the limb being cut away so that the ladder still has something to cling to when it rises and swings gaily in the breeze."

It all looks very nice but if you had to do the work and supply tools to do the work I am sure that the Lands Department would have a strike on their hands."

Friends Group begins

Throughout the late 80s discussions were had regarding the creation of a "Friends" group to further assist the Committee of Management. On 19th February 1990 the 'Friends of the Ocean Grove Nature Reserve (FoOGNR)' was formed. This group worked with the Committee to maintain the Reserve and there was plenty of work to do. They



dealt with the aftermath of a bushfire that had occurred in January at the western end of the Reserve and drafted a Fire Protection Plan. Grid Reference Posts were installed in the Western Block and a new interpretive sign was erected at the entrance. Ocean Grove Rotary assisted with the connection of water to the Information Centre and the old BBQ's were demolished. A campaign to fund the installation of solar panels was also commenced. Unfortunately the committee also had to deal with feral pigs and more cases of vandalism to the information centre a trend that continued into the early 90s.

Two special people – David & Betty King

by Barry Lingham.

Betty and Dave King made significant contributions to the Ocean Grove Nature Reserve over an extended period of time.

Together, they voluntarily staffed and maintained the Visitor Information Centre for many years. Betty was the conversationalist, keen to talk to visitors about the wonders of the OGNR, while David used his extensive knowledge of the flora and fauna to create wonderful displays that were set up in the Information Centre. David had been a design engineer at Ford Motor Company and he was able to build his own microscopes and adapted old camera lenses to be able to photograph and identify a range of small invertebrates or plants.

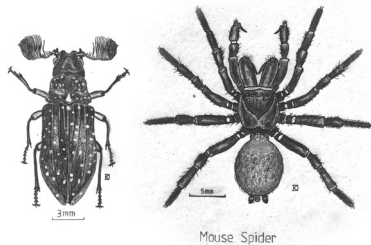
David studied the birds, the life in the freshwater dams, soil samples, reptiles, frogs, ants, beetles, wasps and fungi, but perhaps his favourites were the spiders. He meticulously recorded his observations and sent specimens or photos to the Museum of Victoria. Another of Dave's skills was in the art of drawing. While studying a specimen under a microscope, he would create highly detailed pencil

sketches to accompany his observations.

Some of his sketches and observations are included in the booklet "Go Bush by the Beach".

Betty had a long connection to the Girl Guide movement and she organised the creation of the Mirrabooka Pond zone where girl guides were able to meet and learn about nature. Both Dave and Betty had a passion for sharing the joys of nature with children and several of our current members were first inspired to find out more about the OGNR after a conversation with Betty or Dave in the Information Centre.

Betty and Dave were awarded Life Memberships of the Friends Group in 2008 in recognition of their valuable and dedicated service.



Mouse Spider

Last years of the Committee of Management

The early 90s saw the Committee applying conservation measures to preserve the integrity of the Reserve. A policy decision was made that non-local plants would be removed and replaced with indigenous plants and a grid system was implemented that would allow for easier monitoring of the flora and fauna within the Reserve. It was noted that the Bellarine Yellow Gums were aging and many of the local mammals could no longer be found. In 1992 Graeme Stockton commenced a huge project of propagating approximately 1000 trees from seeds obtained from the Reserve. A bequest from Mrs Wallace was spent on new information signs.

The 1990s also saw a change in government policy and the official management of the Reserve was handed over to the Department of Natural Resources and Environment, as were other parks and reserves in the state. As a result of these

changes, and after 26 years the Committee of Management became an Advisory Committee in 1994. The role of this Committee, again made up of volunteers representing different community groups, was routine maintenance and the promotion of the Reserve.

Unfortunately this change in management saw a decline in the supervision of the area. The entrance gate was locked against vehicles, but the Reserve was still open to pedestrian traffic. The Information Centre suffered more vandalism. When people became aware of the situation, local community members campaigned for easier access to be re-established. To assist with the work of the Reserve a Flora and Fauna Subcommittee was established in 1995 and a Constitution and the Functions of the Advisory Committee were tabled.

Mirrabooka Brownie Pond

Mirrabooka Pond is located off the Acacia Track in the south east section of the Reserve. During the late 70s to early 80s, two field naturalists, Paul Chaplin and Gwen Yarnold were doing fungi surveys when they found a natural depression which collected water when it rained. Native plants, mainly non-indigenous, as was accepted in those days, were planted around it.

Personnel from Mirrabooka Girl Guides Camp in Kingston Park asked the Reserve Committee if the Brownies could use a pond area in the Ocean Grove Nature Reserve for gatherings. The committee agreed and initially an area near the Information Centre was scooped out and black plastic was laid to hold water. Unfortunately, it did not work well and the

pond off the Acacia Track was suggested instead. Seating was added. So that is how Mirrabooka pond was named. The name came from the East Gippsland Gunnai/Kurnai language group and means "Fields by pleasant waters". The Mirrabooka Committee funded the printing of a new information leaflet at this time.



Revitalisation of the Friends Group, mid 1990s

Although still keen, many of the volunteers were getting older and were unable to complete the physical activities needed to maintain the Reserve. In 1994 a public meeting was called to enable the Friends Group to improve this situation. That meeting led to Therese Pape and her associates revitalising the Friends Group. The group became more structured and meetings were minuted and records kept. That same year the group was also incorporated as the Friends of Ocean Grove Nature Reserve and Lachie Jackson was appointed as ranger.

New activities were established in more formal ways and the Friends took part in weed control, access track maintenance, vermin control and plant and animal surveys. The Information Centre was painted and displays upgraded. Ray Hodge, Graeme Tribe and Dave King were important contributors to these works. Roller doors were installed and a generator and wood heater were purchased. A box for leaflets was also installed outside the Centre. In 1995 the refurbished Information Centre was again opened to the public.

Launch of new Reserve brochure by Gary Spry, M.P, 1997.



Construction of nest boxes and tree planting was carried out. The Friends participated in the Information Centre roster and conducted excursions and co-ordinated school visits to the Reserve. Ray Hodge and Dave King were particularly busy conducting numerous tours for school groups. A new brochure was produced by Peter Cummins, with details of the bird life and a plant list was provided by P. Gibbs from his 1992 study, Draft Management Plan for the Ocean Grove Nature Reserve. Some of these activities were curtailed by the Friends when stricter occupational health and safety regulations were introduced and public liability became paramount. However at this time there was greater input from Parks Victoria and appropriate contract staff were employed for specific tasks.

In January 1994, more fire caused concern when it broke out in the grass tree area.



Memories from Lachie Jackson

My first visit to the Nature Reserve was way back in the early 1990s in the capacity of a firefighter. I was working as a Park Ranger when I got called out to the reserve. Unfortunately it was a night shift and all I got to see on that visit was smoke, flames and dust, which was not an ideal introduction. Returning in the daylight some days later I observed the different vegetation types and basically what the reserve was offering the Community as a passive recreation and education area. Speaking as a past Ocean Grove resident I find it strange that I and many others within the town had never been into the reserve and knew very little about it. This was all to change when I and my senior managers met at the front gate of the reserve with a local lady known as Mrs T. Pape. We discussed the future direction of the Reserve and who would take on the role of day to day management. Mrs Pape went to great lengths to tell us about the many local residents who were unhappy that the Reserve had been closed and who felt that it should be open for all to enjoy.

After several meetings it was decided that the Government should be appointed as Managers and the National Park Service would look after line management -myself in other words. I had real reservations with this being fully aware of the issues facing the reserve. This led me to speak at length with Ray Hodge, who gave me a sound understanding of the history of the Reserve and what had transpired before the National Parks Service took over management.

In saying this, I must acknowledge the late Ray Hodge because he was such an inspirational person. I have nothing but admiration for Ray as he was one of nature's gentlemen and I still miss him terribly.

I can still clearly remember just standing there shaking my head during my first proper tour of the Reserve. Issues included the main access track was overgrown and full of pot holes, the Info Centre building was in



a deplorable condition due to vandalism, overall the reserve was in a very sad state. After several hours of just taking notes, I returned to the office and demanded a meeting with all relevant departments. We needed a plan and the funds to carry it out. The task of re-opening the reserve to the general public was my goal and I was determined to make this happen. After many months of damned hard work and spending all my allocated budget and some, we were once again able to open the front gate.

It was after this that a new Friends Group was formed and they were simply fantastic in helping me achieve the results that I was striving to achieve. Their help, encouragement, commitment and staffing of the info center every weekend was just an amazing commitment and helped me get the Reserve to where it deserved to be.

The numbers of visitors continued to increase and about 12 months after the reopening, I was able to secure ongoing funding and staff hours so the reserve could receive the long awaited works it needed. The Reserve was booming and combined with the efforts of the hard working Friends Group, I could see no reason why this wouldn't continue.

While I am now retired and not actively involved in the Reserve I feel it is in good hands with Parks Victoria and the support of the Friends Group. I am sure this magical little block of remnant vegetation will receive the attention it richly deserves and I wish all involved in the Reserve all my very best and hope that the goals they seek to achieve come to fruition. (Personal communication 2016)

The late 1990s

In 1997 the Ocean Grove Nature Reserve came under the management of Parks Victoria and discussions commenced regarding a Draft Management Plan.

A vegetation list was compiled by Chris Pitfield and it was noted by Dave King that where, as little as 4-5 years previously, there were fish in the lake and Sugar Gliders in the Reserve, sadly now they were gone.

Fire in the Reserve

In April 1997, fire again caused devastation when it burnt about 40 hectares (1/6 of the Reserve) in the south west corner. Living Bellarine Yellow Gums plus the stags of older dead trees that contained many hollows were the victims.

The late 1990s saw the Friends Group working towards repairing damage from over 20 different fires that had occurred within the Reserve over the last 7 years. It was proposed that the group would seek funding from Parks Victoria to undertake the 'Yellow Gum Revegetation Project'. They were successful and work started in 1998 as outlined by Ray Hodge.

Below & right: Tree planting working bee, 1998.



Yellow Gum Revegetation Project

by Ray Hodge. Excerpt from The Whistler, October 1997.

The friends of the nature reserve are making plans to substantially restore the fire ravaged areas of the reserve during the next twelve months. Some burnt dead wattles and she-oaks will be selectively felled, opening up the understory to the sunlight and indirectly providing shelter to the smaller creatures of the bush.

Substantial numbers of eucalypt seedlings, the majority yellow gums, grown from locally collected seed, will be planted throughout the reserve. This should reinvigorate the plant stock and return the bush to a semblance of its former condition.

To encourage a viable population of native marsupials, bats and hollow nesting birds, specifically constructed nesting boxes and strategically placed hollow limb sections will be erected in the remaining trees.



Yellow gums burnt fire, 1997.



Homes are customised by Reserve animals

by Ray Hodge. Excerpt from The Whistler, June 2000.

Like many things in life, the endeavours of the FOGNR do not always turn out the way they are expected. This time last year, more than 350 seedlings were planted to revegetate the previously fire damaged area. Since then we have experienced of the driest years on record, as well as one of the hottest and longest summers. A ten centimetre seedling thrust into the soil, surrounded by rank grass growth and left to its own devices might hardly be expected to survive in these circumstances. But surprisingly, a number have done just that.

And the fate of the nest boxes; ...the positioning of the nesting boxes in the remaining dead trees was expected to house hollow-nesting birds and provide secure sleeping places for possums and bats. The guidelines for construction of these boxes were followed to the letter - or rather the millimetre and strict instructions as to interior dimensions, ventilation, siting in the trees, and height above the ground and so on were followed precisely. And the results of all this meticulous construction? A recent stocktake discovered that bees inhabited boxes designed for galahs, tree creepers ignored their apartments, possums were living in parrot boxes and in one case, a ringtail slept in the basement



as bees set up home in the ceiling. And not only that, but entrances sawn to an exact circular tolerance had been chewed to an enlarged indefinite shape and in some cases additional exits had been opened in walls and ceilings.

Managing the Reserve

Over the years there have been many staunch defenders and carers of the Reserve all with passionate views on how to look after such a special and significant area. Committee meetings have enabled ideas to turn into plans and finally physical changes in the Reserve. Although at times ideas have been hotly contested there can be no doubt that every individual had the best interests of the Reserve at heart. As stated in the 'Report to Friends of the Ocean Grove Nature Reserve Flora and Fauna Subcommittee' (June 1997) while advising on the Draft Management Plan.

"Obviously many people have had widely different views on the vision of what the OGNR should be, and the management practices needed to shape the reserve. There is no "right method" to manage the reserve; all that can be done is to ensure that the best efforts that can be made by well meaning and informed people who care for the OGNR are implemented."



The early 2000s

The early 2000s saw the Friends group continue to be very active in promoting the Reserve. They attended festivals and ran events in the Reserve such as ponding, lichen walks and bat surveys. The break in the drought at this time saw the Bellarine Yellow Gums and the Swamp Gums improve with long awaited rain. Some bird species also returned and the rains were such that the lake actually overflowed in 2001.

Ongoing works by the Friends Group (2000 - 2005) included new wood burning BBQ's in the picnic area, upgrading a track to the lake for wheelchair access and building a bridge across to the island. Seating and a bird hide were built and planting was undertaken on the island. The Reserve front gate was moved closer to the road, and the Information Centre

received solar power and a new skylight in the kitchen.

A new bird list with 'Commonly Seen', 'Occasionally Seen' and 'Rarely Seen' notations and a Plant List were completed in 2002.

In December of 2002 a successful commemoration was held to mark the 40th Anniversary of the establishment of the original fundraising committee, instrumental in purchasing the property.

The AGM of the FoOGNR in August 2005 was marred by having insufficient nominations for the office bearing positions. However an extraordinary AGM was held the following month when the positions were finally filled and a new committee installed.

Researching the ecology of the Reserve

The flora and fauna of the Reserve has attracted the attention and study of many citizen scientists, natural history groups and researchers. Continued changes in fire regimes, vegetation, management practices and climate have been monitored since the Reserve was established.

Study of the flora of the Reserve was first undertaken, and flora lists were published, by amateur botanists from the Geelong Field Naturalists Club (GFNC). A significant study of the ecology was undertaken by Jennifer Withers and D H Ashton (1977 Studies on the Status of Unburnt Eucalyptus Woodland at Ocean Grove, Victoria.) The subsequent vegetation changes at the Reserve were monitored by Ian Lunt (1998 Two Hundred Years of Land Use and Vegetation Change in Remnant Coastal Woodland in Southern Australia.)

In 2007, Graeme Stockton was commissioned by the Committee to produce a list of the flora of the Reserve. This study mapped the location of plant species. The committee awarded the

inaugural Dave King Memorial Grant in 2013 to support the research of Latrobe University student, Ben Zeeman (Vegetation Dynamics of Long-unburned Coastal Woodland: Changes from 1971 to 2012.)

Fauna surveys were conducted by the GFNC and many contributions of observations were made by individuals. Dave King studied the invertebrate fauna and contributed specimens to the museum, along with many informative articles.

Bird life of the Reserve has always attracted birding enthusiasts. The GFNC conducted a literature search to find all recorded bird observations and completed a review of the changing bird populations. The collected information, *The Birds of Ocean Grove Nature Reserve*, was published in 2004.

Today, the Friends are active in supporting research undertaken about the Reserve. Members organise and contribute to biodiversity surveys that enrich our knowledge and understanding of this special habitat.

The OGNR - A Haven for Birdlife

by Barry Lingham, Nature Reserve News, May 2001.

The value of the OGNR as a habitat for many bird species cannot be over emphasised. As summer finishes, many species pass through the OGNR. Recently, Rufous Fantails have been seen as they make their annual migration out from the Otway Ranges to move to Eastern Victoria and then to places further north. Large numbers of Silvereyes have been feeding along the north track, with many of these birds being visitors from Tasmania - they differ from the mainland birds by having rufous coloured flanks. Many other seed eaters are also present, including Red-browed Firetails, White-fronted Chats and Red-rumped Parrots.

Along the western edge of the Nature Reserve, you will find the beautiful Flame Robin with the male displaying a brilliant flame-orange breast and grey back. The female bird is duller, with a generally brown-grey plumage and buff coloured flashes on the wings. They arrive in April and can be seen for most of the winter. The Pink Robin is also a winter visitor, which means that we do not see the males in the pink plumage. Look for a bird that is a dark brownish colour with no white feathers on the outer parts of the tail. It makes a noise similar to a twig being snapped.

The Yellow Gums are starting to blossom, after three years of almost no flowering due to the dry spell. This has attracted many honeyeaters plus lorikeets and other nectar feeders. Keep an eye out for Swift Parrots - another Tasmanian visitor - that may turn up in areas where eucalypts are flowering. They have not been recorded for a long time, but may visit this year.

Yellow-faced Honeyeaters, Brown Headed Honeyeaters and White-naped Honeyeaters all appreciate the nectar found in the blossoming Yellow Gums and they visit the OGNR at this time of year. If you see a small bird with a long slender beak and a loud trilling call, it is probably an Eastern Spinebill moving about from one flowering shrub to the next. These delightful birds arrive in April and depart in late spring.

There is nowhere else on the Bellarine Peninsular that this range of birds can be seen. Although some species, such as Scarlet Robins, have become locally extinct during the past decade, the Reserve still supports a wide range of bird species. This is both intrinsically important from an ecological perspective and a bonus for those of us who enjoy seeing and hearing our local birds. Many visitors travel to the OGNR on a regular basis, from Geelong, Melbourne or beyond, just to get the opportunity to observe a large number of bird species in a relatively small environment. Let us hope the Nature Reserve continues to provide a haven for birdlife as we struggle to cope with changes during the 21st Century.



'Go Bush by the Beach'

In February 2003, when Colin McIntyre was President of the FoGNER the Committee decided to help publicise the OGNR by creating a new publication.

This booklet gave a snapshot of the flora and fauna of the Reserve, the history of this special place and the development of the Friends Group.

With Colin as the inspiration and manager of the project, grant monies were successfully obtained from the CCMA, ALCOA, COGG and The Professionals real estate group. Colin engaged the services of local graphic artist Jane Kempe who created the fantastic artwork and layout of the booklet.

A range of people contributed to the information in the publication. Gordon McCarthy provided many photographs of birds, mammals and reptiles and helped

to provide information about them. Valda Dedman submitted photos and information on the fungi. Dave King skilfully drew some special insects and Dave and Colin McIntyre added information. Barry Lingham photographed and described the special trees and flowers of the OGNR, wrote the information about the birds and contributed to the section on animals. Mammals and reptiles were described by Ray Hodge.

The process of creating the publication helped the Friends Group to focus on the details of the natural history of the OGNR, widening our own knowledge. The history was researched by Colin and recorded in detail. The final publication was completed by late 2004.

The booklet has since been used by visitors to enhance their understanding of the OGNR and by many school groups who are studying the ecology and management of habitats. The contributions from many people created a publication that has been a useful source of information and knowledge for more than 10 years.

Rare Finds

The early 21st century saw the disappearance of many species that were common in the Reserve. Any new sighting of a species was reported with much excitement.

Unfortunately many of these sightings were not repeated.

2000 **Nitidus (Coconut) Ants** were successfully transferred from the Inverleigh Common and Bibron's Froglets were trapped, even though it was unusual for them to be so far south

2001 2 **Little Forest Eptesicus Bats** were discovered

2002 A **Long Necked Tortoise**

2004 For a short period, the **Fiddler Beetle** was found in the Reserve. This was notable as it hadn't been seen in the area for about 40 years, however their appearance was short lived as they disappeared again soon after sighting. Another rare find at this time was a

Green-gilled Mushroom.

2007 February that year also saw **Nitidis Ants** rediscovered on the north boundary of the Reserve. The **Coconut Ant** (*Papyrius nitidus*) also known as the **Nitidis Ant** had not been seen for some time, in spite of regular searching. Several attempts to colonise these ants in the Reserve had been made without success, so this find was particularly significant.

Phytophthora was located near the north end of the Centre Track through testing.

Creation of the tennis courts

by Stuart Willsher, Parks Victoria Ranger, 2016.

I had only just started with the Bellarine team in 2005, when local environmentalist Graeme Stockton made what he thought was a significant floristic find within the Ocean Grove Nature Reserve. Following inspection, it was confirmed that he had indeed discovered a small community of the rare Pale Turpentine Bush *Beyeria lechenaultii* struggling to survive in the shadows of the thick tree cover. They were also clearly being grazed on by Wallabies who were at home in the overgrown forest.

Given the significance of this discovery I worked with the President of the Friends group Michael Connell and we worked through the best approach to protecting these plants. What were the threats? What could we do with the Wallabies? What about all these trees, could we remove them or at least reduce the shading? Finally, a two pronged approach was decided upon. Friends groups members and Parks Victoria staff began to remove the sapling trees immediately around the plants. This thinning increased and eventually an area roughly the size of a tennis court was thinned. A fencing contractor then erected a rabbit proof fence around the site which cemented its look as a tennis court, a nickname that has stuck since. We copped a bit of flak for erecting a fenced off area within an already fenced off Reserve but the effect of this simple management approach was evident quickly with new growth appearing on the plants and an abundance of other ground covers species becoming evident. The success was such that Michael pushed for a second tennis court to be erected nearby to protect another significant species struggling to survive

Today this site is popular for plant folk looking to see the colour of our wildflower display that has emerged within this

protected area. One of my favourite things to do is to send visitors to the tennis courts and to see the looks of confusion on their faces as they head off. But when they return they get the joke and understand the importance that these courts play in the protection of the Reserve's diversity.





Capturing the beauty of the Reserve

by Jennifer Carr, 2016.

I moved to Ocean Grove in 2002 from Melbourne. I had always loved nature, particularly birds, and I relished living in an area where there was such a variety of habitats and places to explore. Getting to know the Ocean Grove Nature Reserve was a gradual process. I used to park near the front entrance initially, and walk the East Track along Grubb Rd. There were often a few Superb Fairy Wrens, Brown Thornbills and White-browed Scrubwren, but often not a lot else. Little did I know about the variety of birds that could be found along the north and south tracks.



I started writing about birds for the Ocean Grove Voice, and in 2009 I was told that there were a pair of Red-backed Kingfishers in the Nature Reserve. I thought that I'd have buckley's hope of finding them in such a large area, but I went to the east track and to my surprise I saw both kingfishers virtually straight away. After that I just felt a magnet was drawing me to the Nature Reserve.



I've seen and photographed Striated Pardalotes, Spotted Pardalotes, Brown Goshawks, Wedge-tailed Eagles, Whistling Kites, Black-shouldered Kites, Flame Robins, Eastern Yellow Robins, Pink Robins, Masked Woodswallows, White-browed Woodswallows, Rufous Whistlers, Golden Whistlers, many varieties of Honeyeaters, and the list goes on! I've almost stepped on three Copperhead Snakes when I've been looking up in the trees rather than concentrating on where I am going (yikes)! I've seen echidnas, wallabies and heard the one koala that is left grunt like a Harley Davidson motorbike!



There are two bird hides in the Nature Reserve and I'd like a dollar for every hour I've spent in them over the years!



There have been many changes around the Nature Reserve in the short time that I've been frequenting it. The Yellowgums Estate has expanded along the border of the south and west tracks. Kingston and Oakdene Estates are developing along Grubb Road, and opposite the Nature Reserve there is a proposed shopping complex about to be constructed. All of this will no doubt impact on the animals and birds that inhabit the area. I doubt if birds like Wedge-tailed Eagles will be seen in the future, as there will be less farmland and open space for them to peruse. I've seen people walking their dogs in the reserve and hoons doing wheelies in the car park. More people means more cats and dogs will be around to prey on the animals and birds. It would be nice to be able to pick up the nature reserve and put it somewhere away from all these developments!



Nothing stays the same but I do fear that I've seen the best of the Nature Reserve. It's a lovely place to escape to, and I hope that it's looked after and appreciated.

2006 onwards

The 35th Anniversary of the opening of the Reserve was held in 2006, with a reunion to mark the occasion. In that year a bequest of \$10,000 was received from Heather McKellar. This bequest left the Friends in a good position to tackle the problem of the thick undergrowth that had grown up around the Bellarine Yellow and Swamp gums throughout the Reserve. Traditionally, fire was used as a management tool but stricter controls on the use of fire and the encroaching housing estates have resulted in the Reserve undergoing lower intensity burns or often missing out altogether. The last ten years have seen a range of management strategies used in an effort to protect the remnant Yellow Gums and to encourage new growth.



In 2006 the Friends started what was titled the 'Indigenous Garden Project' with the aim of clearing an area close to the information centre which would then be planted out with indigenous plants so locals could see what they would look like in their gardens. A forest mower was hired and the area cleared. The Friends were heartened by the amount of regrowth from long dormant seeds and it was decided that they would take a wait and see approach before actually planting in the area. Thus the project was renamed the Open

Woodland Restoration Project. In 2008 the project continued and a summer fire crew and drought relief crew assisted.

The forest mower has proved to be a wonderful tool for creating a patchwork of cleared areas within the Reserve with most of these areas having been replanted with Bellarine Yellow Gums and other indigenous vegetation over the last ten years. The Friends have learnt from previous attempts and now construct large tree guards the protect each seedling surrounded by chicken wire held up by three stakes in an effort to keep out hungry rabbits and wallabies. Another approach has been the establishment of protective fences around the Turpentine Bush.



Bree's Walk

Growing up bushwalking with my nanna I always had an appreciation for the environment. I have fond memories of being well-abled exploring the paths of 'The Ocean Grove Nature Reserve', especially the Banksia trail. Photographing the tall Xanthorea trees and appreciating/absorbing the sites, smells and sounds that made me forget I was only a few minutes away from any built up areas. I wish I had my husband Lachlan back then to point out the birds I've learned to appreciate and still learning to identify!

After becoming debilitated with Multiple Sclerosis, I dealt with a tremendous amount of grief and loss at not being able to do many of the things I enjoyed including my walking in the bush! Ever since the debility set in I have been fighting to get my health back to better than what it was. Combined with my love of helping people and personal achievement on my ten-year diagnosis anniversary I came up with the craziest goal I'd had to date! I planned to raise money for the Reserve by walking 3km around the Banksia Trail. What was I thinking? I could hardly walk 5 meters some days!

After months of training, pumping vitamins, dieting, seeing exercise therapists, buying new equipment, the day had arrived and I was determined to get to as far as I could. I hoped to finish. I had so much support from the community and especially the Friends of the Ocean Grove Nature Reserve and Parks Victoria. Both groups had spent a tremendous amount of energy making the perfect walking track to roll my walker on and I loved every second I was out there. I saw the Xanthorea trees I had missed so much and loved the sites/smells and sounds so much. I motored through the first half in

by Bree-Arne Manley, 2015.



roughly 40 minutes! A hot pace for how far I had to go.

After a snack and a rest, we all moved on! I appreciated my visit from the lovely Friend who pointed out the 'Drosera' flower off to the side of the track. My hips began to lock and I went into robot mode where I could only keep putting one foot in front of the other, collapsing every now and then. The crowd of supporters dwindled and I was left with just a few faithful followers willing to complete the journey at a snails pace including my mother, brother, a few faithful friends (Andrea, Debbie) and of course 'Boo Book' Brook (The Go Pro lady). After many pit stops, an empty water bottle, stories and a gruelling 5 hours and 45 minutes I crossed over the finish line at the end. I was so overwhelmed with accomplishment and exhaustion I cried!



Information Centre

In 2007 a major upgrade of the Information Centre building began. The Centre was painted and information panels, designed by Fiona Topolcsanyi, were installed. The upgrade of the Information centre building continued in 2009 with a large white board installed to record animal sightings. New display cabinets were put in place and the concrete floor was ground.

Information Centre Volunteers

The Information Centre at the Reserve has been consistently staffed by volunteers throughout the years. They are often visitors first contact with the Reserve and the Friends group. In 2007 the Friends participated in the Kookaburra Awards; an award for excellence for community based not-for-profit organisations. Centre volunteers were nominated for this award. Below is an extract detailing the roles fulfilled by the centre volunteers.

The feedback received from members of the public is indicative of the success the Visitor Information Centre has been over a long period. So many positive comments have been made to the volunteers and also recorded in the Visitors' Book and via the Centre Diary. Centre volunteers have often been instrumental in the recruitment of new members for the Friends Group. The personal touch of having someone in attendance at the Centre accelerates the interest of visitors in the Reserve.

Additionally, volunteers are keen to talk about the important role the Reserve plays in conservation on the Bellarine Peninsula.

Visitors frequently ask for the list of bird sightings in the Reserve so that they can look out for particular species when on a walk. Volunteers are able to point visitors to view the wetland which may be like a lake, reverberating with the sound of frogs if good seasonal rains have fallen. Volunteers may suggest the main walking track, the Banksia Trail, because of the variety of vegetation or, if children are present, the Centre Track due to the possibility of seeing wallabies. The North Track may be recommended if people are interested in seeing the extensive stand of Grass-trees or the Scaevola Track to view Bellarine Yellow Gums or wild flowers in spring.



Dianne Jones Centre Volunteer

by Dianne Jones, Centre Volunteer, 2016.

I moved to Point Lonsdale in 1999. When I went to Ocean Grove for shopping I would go for a walk at the Reserve as I had always loved the bush. I soon joined the Friends' Group and later became a volunteer at the Information Centre. Sharing my love of the Reserve was rewarding. Although it was often quiet, I sometimes had tree dragons, huntsmen spiders and possums as visitors. It was special when children came into the Centre. I gave them our booklet "Go Bush by the Beach" and an activity sheet to do on their walk. When they returned there were leaflets, a quiz sheet and native animal colouring-ins. Parents appreciated this as much as the children.





Recent Projects

A new promotional flyer and membership form was designed in 2008 and a **Vision Statement** was developed.....

'The Friends of the Ocean Grove Nature Reserve will work in partnership with Parks Victoria to preserve and enhance the reserve's natural values, foster community.'



The newsletter, **'Nature Reserve News'** was redesigned by Chris Tsernjavski and a very successful Inaugural Open Day was held in October of 2008. The **Discovery Trail** was launched in 2010. A leaflet explained fourteen points of interest around the Banksia Trail. This project was made possible by a community grant from Parks Victoria. Also in 2010 Barry Lingham was presented with a Life Membership for outstanding service.



The last few years has seen a marked increase in the population of Ocean Grove with the Reserve now a very popular destination for families wanting to enjoy nature, bird watchers and photographers making the most of the wonderful surroundings and locals out for their daily run. You are likely to see groups of kindergarten children in the Reserve as the trend for Bush Kinders and Nature Play continues to grow, while unfortunately the cost of bus hire and departmental rules has seen a decrease in the number of schools that visit the site.



The tasks of the volunteers include those previously mentioned and general housekeeping duties together with an information service, guided tours and speaking engagements. Volunteers come and go and each new person brings their own expertise. The dynamics of the group changes and there are new initiatives and challenges each year.



The grass tree spikes are now metres high, the Casuarinas, Bellarine Yellow Gums and Golden Wattles are in full bloom, Echidnas dig in the grasses in search of ant larvae, Black Wallabies feed on green pickings along the fire breaks and from everywhere come the calls of honeyeaters, cuckoos, pardalotes, Grey Thrushes and whistlers.

The value of these 143 hectares of native coastal bush land – the last remaining significant section on the Bellarine Peninsula – cannot be overstated. It is important that the Reserve be preserved and enhanced and the Friends Group request that you participate in the protection and restoration of the flora and fauna within the Reserve and on the Peninsula.

Life Members

Lachie Jackson	1998
Ray Hodge	2001
Betty King	2008
Dave King	2008
Barry Lingham	2010



The Friends are awarded a thank you plaque from Parks Victoria, 1998

