

Chapter 7: Biological Studies of the Prom – and Fires

The biological survey of 1905 had provided a wealth of information about the natural resources of the Promontory but the Committee of Management was well aware that there was ample scope for further investigation. Accordingly, two botanists from the National Herbarium and Botanic Garden—J. W. Audas and H. P. R. St John—were commissioned to make a systematic study of the vegetation of the park and, in September 1908, the first of a series of expeditions was commenced.

Both men were regarded as competent naturalists and their reports contained much of general interest as well as their observations on the vegetation. The tally of 182 different species of plant recorded during the 1905 survey was increased by Audas and St. John to 364. All of the additions were located in the south and south-west sector, which was the portion they first examined.

Again no foxes, rabbits or lyrebirds were seen, although the two men were convinced that the lyrebird did in fact inhabit the gullies of Mount Latrobe.

The dingo, so abundant 40 or 50 years earlier, had apparently gone altogether—supplanted by the wild dog which they considered to be a much greater pest than the dingo was ever likely to have been. Although Sambar Deer were reputed to be on the Promontory they saw only the diminutive Hog Deer and this animal was believed to be there in only small numbers.

By way of contrast they remarked on the huge flocks of Black Swans on Shallow Inlet (which was not within the boundaries of the Park)—thousands of them. Several bird men were disbelieving. Hundreds were credible but not thousands. However, both Shallow Inlet and Corner Basin are favoured haunts of swans. During the warmer months the shallow waters of these inlets are among the best feeding grounds to be found on the Victorian coast as the water birds well know.

St John added twelve more birds to the 1905 tally and reported the sighting of koalas, wombats, echidnas and black-tailed wallabies.

In October 1909 the second official botanical survey was undertaken. On this occasion Audas and St John were joined by Dr C. S. Sutton, a well known Melbourne physician whose recreation (and, in later years, be it added, preoccupation) was botany. The party examined the eastern and northern portions of the Park around about Sealers and Refuge Coves, the Singapore Peninsula, Barry's Creek, Mount Vereker and the Darby River.

Their report enumerated 135 plants additional to the species already recorded. Among them was the Wedge Fern, a plant never before found in Victoria, which they discovered in a gully at the headwaters of Chinamans Creek and Barrys Creek. Curiously enough this fern has,

to this day, never been found in any other part of the State.

During the construction of the fire access track to Five Mile Beach some years ago, a stand of Lilly Pillies was located in a gully of the headwaters of one of the tributaries of Barrys Creek. Miraculously, the gully has escaped the ravages of a succession of fires which have invaded this part of the Park and some enormous Messmates, Blackwoods and Lilly Pillies commingle in all their magnificence. This was the gully where Audas, St John and Sutton found the Wedge Fern. Even though it may lack the fern dell charm of the more renowned Lilly Pilly Gully, this gully is a gem to be valued for its rarity alone.

The three botanists were hardly enthusiastic about the grazing cattle which they saw on the plains but, for the reason mentioned above, it was the policy of the Committee of Management to permit the continuance of such grazing under licence, and this policy was to continue unchanged for a long time to come.

The presence of the 42 alien plants seen by the collectors (and this number included three 'proclaimed' weeds) was ascribed by them to the cattle.

Rabbits still had not reached the Park, possibly because the Strzelecki and Hoddle farmers were able to provide adequately for the steadily expanding population of these animals on their own holdings. Their arrival in the Park would be but a question of time. Perhaps the inevitable invasion would be halted by the fence the Committee hoped to build.

The facility with which the botanists (and others) moved about on the Promontory seems quite incredible today. In their time there were serviceable tracks. The big fires of 1907–08 had cleared away much of the undergrowth and the grazing cattle had kept it from becoming too rank. On Singapore Peninsula in particular, where now one's rate of progress on foot might be from half to one mile an hour, overland travel was easy. Arnie Smith of Port Welshpool claims to have once walked barefoot from Mount Hunter to Mount Singapore. Now one would need to be not only well shod but preceded by a bulldozer.

When Black surveyed the Peninsula he caused a substantial granite cairn to be erected on the summit of Mount Singapore and the cairn was a favourite picnic spot for many following years. It still remains but is scarcely visited now unless by seasoned bushwalkers.

The Committee of Management was fully alive to the advantages to be gained by buffering the Park against undesirable forms of human activity, but it failed to gain any change in the status of either the excluded Mount Hunter–Seaforth area of the Peninsula or the southern end of the Yanakie Isthmus. It did, however, persuade the Lands Department to recommend to the Minister



Field Naturalists Club of Victoria members at Bull Plain (Vereker Range) during their 1912 excursion to Wilsons Promontory.
Photo courtesy Historic Places, Department of Sustainability and Environment, Victoria

that a number of the islands near the shores of the Promontory be brought within its control.

Towards the end of 1909 notice was given in the Victoria Gazette of the intention to permanently reserve for national park purposes Shellback Island, Norman Island, the Anser Islands, Wattle Island, Rabbit Island, Bennison Island, Granite Islands and Do Boy [Doughboy] Island. After a decent interval of almost seven years the intention was realised and on page 2341 of the Gazette of 21 June 1916 there appeared a notice to the effect that the above-mentioned several islands were permanently reserved from sale by an Order in Council made on 22 November 1909. Surely someone must have forgotten to have the Order published in 1909!

It will be recalled that in November 1898 the greater part of the Promontory had been gazetted as a sanctuary for native fauna in anticipation of its proclamation as a permanently reserved national park. Some years earlier (in 1890) the Game Act had been proclaimed and it provided for the declaration of native game reserves which would be subject to some kind of oversight by departmental inspectors.

The Committee of Management possessed no powers under this Act and neither it nor its employees had much chance of stamping out "poaching" or illegal shooting in the Park. It therefore sought to have the National Park brought within the scope of the Game Act so that its status as a fauna sanctuary might be recognised and properly policed. This

recommendation, too, was agreed to and in 1910 the Gazette of 7 September, page 4118, carried a notice to the effect that the whole of Wilsons Promontory National Park within the already defined boundaries, together with that portion of Corner Basin enclosed by a line drawn from Yanakie of Millar's Landing to Mount Singapore, was proclaimed a Native Game Reserve. The Proclamation included the islands mentioned above and, interestingly enough, the portion of Singapore Peninsula which, at that time was occupied under Miner's Licence—to wit, the Mount Hunter area.

From that date it became unlawful for anyone to kill or destroy any native game named in the Third Schedule to the 1890 Game Act, and the prohibition applied throughout the whole year. This document was signed by Sir Gibson Carmichael who, in the following month, visited the Park for the famous nature study excursion which is mentioned in the next chapter. He thus saw for himself the place his proclamation concerned.

In this same month, October 1910, Audas and St. John carried out the third and last official botanical survey. This time they revisited Sealers Cove and examined the country inland from Five Mile Beach. Their report added 42 native and eight alien species to the list already recorded for the Park—a list now claimed by them to number more than 600 species of fern and flowering plant. Fifty of them were introduced weeds.

At the time of their visit the big Yellow Stringybarks



Field naturalists in their meal tent during the 1912 excursion.
Photo courtesy Historic Places, Department of Sustainability and Environment, Victoria

(*Eucalyptus muelleriana*) on the Vereker Range were being felled to provide posts for the "vermin-proof" fence which, at last, was about to be erected.

This fence, although often regarded as defining the boundary of the Park, in fact followed the boundary for a short distance in only two or three places—where it coincided with the eastern boundary of the two blocks 74 and 76 held by the Falls family. Two of the four gates allowed access to the Falls' blocks while No. 1 gate up near Corner Basin opened into that part of the Park which the Committee of Management used as a mustering paddock and, from time to time, leased to graziers.

During the Second World War the decaying fence fell into irreparable condition and the fire of 1951 destroyed most of what remained of it. However, traces are still to be seen near Corner Basin near the site of the old No. 1 gate. Some of the unburned posts are remarkably well preserved after many years of exposure to the weather—which speaks well for the wisdom of the Committee in choosing Yellow Stringybark for the job.

Because of the present content of introduced exotic fauna it has been thought rather pointless to rebuild it for the purpose it originally served, and successive Committees of Management had chosen to use available funds for more urgent and necessary works within the Park. Then, too, there was always the hope that some of the Parish of Yanakie South might yet be added to the Park when it would be time enough to think of erecting a fence to define the boundary.

In presenting the botanists' report Professor Ewart mentioned the Committee's plan to publish a handbook on the national park, a book which, he added, would be

of but temporary usefulness because it was intended that the native flora and fauna from other parts of the Commonwealth were to be liberated with the object of their ultimate acclimatisation within the Park. The handbook never was published but the Committee's species-conservation program was in full swing by the time the seven-foot high fence had been completed in May 1912.

In its second annual report, published late in 1910, reference was made to the various species of animal already liberated in accordance with the scheme. They included six emus, three lyrebirds, five satin bowerbirds, two grey kangaroos, two rufous-necked wallabies, five wombats, twenty-six possums and two Gunn's bandicoots. Once the fence was up there would be small chance of the beasts escaping into South Yanakie.

The Christmas holidays of 1912 were the occasion for the second "camp-out" organised by the Field Naturalists' Club. The participants rambled over a considerable area of territory which, thanks to the efforts of the successive rangers and their assistants, was now endowed with several serviceable tracks.

They were able to explore the environs of Barry's Creek, Mount Vereker, the Landing, the Darby River and even Sealers Cove.

The Committee of Management (which was well represented at the camp-out) used the occasion to initiate its plant-introduction program. The ostensible purpose of the scheme was to save certain rare or vanishing species from the extinction which was believed to be threatening them elsewhere, but the first choice was hardly a judicious one for it included Golden Wattle, Sunshine Acacia and Mahogany Gum, all of which were and still are common enough in their

natural Victorian habitats. However, they were not recognised indigenes of the National Park and their presence in it would have been an adornment and preferable to the exotic conifers, planes and birches which had been planted in the Forestry Department's arboretum over at Barry's Creek.

In addition, seeds (from packets purchased at Brunning's shop in Melbourne) were sown here and there along the tracks, in the gullies and valleys and in other likely spots.

There is now no evidence that any of those introductions endured long enough to become an established element of the vegetation of the National Park, but for the purposes of the record they are listed in the chapter on introduced fauna and flora. Should some sharp-eyed rambler—more than seventy years later—find a hitherto unrecorded plant on the Promontory he would be wise to examine this list of introductions. His "find" might be one of them.

The lyrebirds liberated at Sealers Cove twelve months previously were neither seen nor heard. Even to this day the existence of this bird on the Promontory is a matter for argument. If the bird ever was indigenous to the region it is certainly odd that no mention of it was ever made by the pioneers, collectors and observers who roamed the mountains and valleys of the place in the years before its dedication as a national park. In those less enlightened days 'pheasants', as they were called by the bushmen, were commonly shot for the pot and thus they would have been a talking point. In any event, just how the bird could have established itself there without the aid of man or miracle would have been a teasing puzzle. It is a poor flier [sic] and could not possibly have migrated across the waters of Corner Basin or along the Yanakie Isthmus from the distant Hoddle or Strzelecki Ranges where it was abundant enough.

Had its arrival on the Promontory pre-dated the subsidence of the ancient Bunurong mountain range it surely would have survived, as had the mammalian fauna, and even multiplied to a degree which would have exposed it to observation in what seems to be the highly suitable environment which existed at Sealers Cove or in the eastern valleys of Mount Vereker or Mount Latrobe. But, in the later years that followed, no one has been credited with having actually seen the bird although some have reported hearing its characteristic call. If now it is ever authentically recorded no one will be quite sure whether it is an indigene or a descendant of those introduced in and since 1911.

As suggested above, the koala and several other species of mammal must surely have reached the Promontory along a land corridor furnished with sources of food although such a corridor no longer

exists. Surely the lyrebird could have done the same.

Tourist traffic to the Park in those far-off days was limited. Those who did adventure to its scenic domains were mostly walking tourists, naturalists and other scientific ladies and gentlemen who arrived by boat from Port Franklin or Port Welshpool. With the establishment of a camping centre at the Darby River the Vereker Landing place began to suffer neglect and the shelter hut was used mainly by parties bent on exploring Mount Vereker or picnicking on the shores of Corner Basin.

The water supply there was meagre while at the Darby River water was no problem.

The Yanakie South beach track gradually came to be the accepted route to the Park. The gate at the old footbridge over the river was the entrance point. The track led from Foster or Fish Creek through Yanakie to the "New Homestead" where it turned west toward Shallow Inlet, traversed some difficult hummocks of shifting sand (which later were made more easily negotiable by laying a corduroy track for the jinkers, traps and buggies then in use), and then debouched on to the ocean beach. A run of about ten kilometres along the hard sands towards the Darby River was not invariably a sheer delight. The smoothness of one's passage was rather a matter of luck. Sometimes, as an aftermath of wind and tide, the sand was left rippled like the surface of a corrugated iron roof and ten kilometres of this kind of corrugation was enough to test the durability of the toughest vehicle, to say nothing of the endurance of its occupants.

Briggs, in the reminiscence of the already mentioned trip by the members of the Melbourne Walking Club, recalled that the beach track was in just that condition on the day his party chose to use it. Spokes began to fall from the wheels of the old buggy which they had engaged for the journey. Finally, one too many fell out and the vehicle collapsed, obliging them to resume their role of walkers—with 40 kg packs!

In the years between 1914 and 1918 the world was engaged in its first grand-scale war and the activities on the Promontory gradually tapered off. It had its regular visitors, and its Committee of Management, as opportunity offered, continued its program of acclimatisation of non-endemic animal species. By 1917, 192 animals had been liberated, a notable one being Woodward's Kangaroo, a somewhat rare species from the north and northwest of Australia, which was brought into the Park in 1916.

In the following year Victoria's only indigenous palm (*Livistona australis*) was planted in Lilly Pilly Gully. Seven years later it was reported to be still flourishing but today there is no sign of it having survived the ravages of fire which descended on that lovely gully some years ago [1951].

By 1917 the fox was recognised as a well established denizen of the Park although, surprisingly enough, the rabbit was not yet in evidence. A fox had been seen in 1912 and some effort was made to exterminate the beast but, unhappily, without success. It is generally believed that its kind had reached the Park before the fence was built and that the intervening time had been spent in settling-in the less frequented parts of the Park.

Actually the fence would have been no impediment to the animal because it could have crossed from the Yanakie Isthmus into the Park at low tide by traversing the shallows or mud flats at the point where the fence came down to the shore of Corner Basin near the Vereker Landing.

It is not easy to evaluate the impact the importation of the fox into this country has had on the native fauna.

To a large extent the animal has merely replaced the dingo as a controller of populations of the kind of animal both species prey upon.

We are apt to blame the fox for the apparent disappearance of birds and mammals which were once familiar denizens of the countryside but it is but fair to say that man himself has played the major part in the decline of their populations simply by destroying their natural habitat. It would not have been foxes or cats or any other alien animals which brought about the complete eradication of wallabies, bandicoots, phascogales and the rest from the Melbourne City's square mile. They were all there in 1840 because their habitat was then intact. It is an example to ponder when we are invited to consider the future of Wilsons Promontory National Park and, in fact, any of our national parks. "Development" and nature conservation are not altogether compatible.

As a destroyer the fox is not to be despised as a rival to man but its methods lack finesse. It kills for the sheer love of killing—or, at least, so it seems. On several occasions those who have had occasion to study the mutton bird colony on Bennison Island have noticed many mutilated and dead birds. They have formed the opinion that foxes have been responsible for the carnage.

At low tide the island is connected to the Park mainland by mangrove-lined sand and mudflats which foxes can readily cross. Despite these depredations the colony continues to exist.

So far as tourists were concerned the National Park's red letter day came in 1923 when the Darby Chalet was opened for the accommodation of guests. From that time onward the place became a rendezvous for naturalists, sightseers and tourists from all parts of the world and it remained so for almost twenty years until war once more intruded into the tranquillity and charm of Wilsons Promontory.

The F.N.C.V. celebrated the establishment of the chalet by conducting its fourth excursion to the Park during the summer vacation immediately following. It was led by Charles Daley, the well-known teacher, naturalist, essayist, historian and bushwalker, and he continued as leader of what became a regular event in the years that followed. These annual Christmas parties were always something of a treat for most of the other guests who freely mingled with the naturalists and thus had the opportunity of learning much and seeing more than would otherwise have been likely of what the National Park had to offer for the enjoyment of its visitors.

The opening of the Chalet rendered the permit system obsolete for all except campers, and they could obtain their permits from the ranger.

Tourist publicity ensured a steady flow of paying guests who had merely to book at the Government Tourist Bureau which, at the Committee's request, took over this side of the business.

The increased traffic meant greater revenue. It must have almost seemed that the park could be self-supporting what with income from the Chalet lease and grazing licence fees because, when the depression years descended upon the country, the Government discontinued its annual grant.

To ensure that those who entered the Park would be fully aware of its function as a nature conservation area, and that they would be capable of fending for themselves and providing for their own needs and comfort, it had been the practice to authorise entry by permit. These were issued by the Secretary of the Committee of Management—sometimes not without question as to why the applicant wanted to go there. Kershaw had no intention of encouraging visits by shooting parties or by those who had no interest in preserving scenic places.

Residents of the adjacent districts perhaps exempted themselves from the permit system, mainly for the obvious reason that they knew the ranger as well as he knew them. Strangers needed a permit before they could feel free to wander at will within the Park.

In retrospect the permit system seems to have been a little futile. In the early years of existence as a National Park visitors were relatively few and, if they were strangers to the place, would in their own interest have made themselves known to the ranger. Those who were not strangers to it would have known how to avoid the ranger anyway. Forty thousand hectares of territory is a lot of country for one or two rangers to patrol. The system may have discouraged some illicit shooting and other damaging practices but the most serious damage was being perpetrated by the Committee itself – through its grazing policy – and by its inability to



Cattle on beach at the Prom, c.1930.

Photo courtesy Historic Places, Department of Sustainability and Environment, Victoria

supervise the tin mines over on Mount Hunter.

During the era of the Chalet, when visitors began to be numbered in thousands, there would have been much more point in exercising a strict control and extending the control to other than campers, but by this time the rangers had so many other duties that they could hardly be expected to keep an eye on every visitor.

The situation was aggravated by the circumstance that the camping village was about ten kilometres from the point of entry by road and what happened at the Darby River and anywhere between that river and the Singapore Peninsula was nobody's business.

The Christmas vacation of 1919 was the occasion for what was, at that time, a decidedly unusual event.

By now women were sufficiently emancipated to undertake enterprises formerly indulged only by their menfolk. Camping was one of them and a band of female naturalists conceived the idea of a camp-out on the Prom for girls only.

Eleven young ladies – all members of the F.N.C.V. – took part in the adventure which was later described in the Club's journal and magazine.

The occasion was notable for the acquisition of the

koala 'Teddy Dincombe' who subsequently became well known in Melbourne. Teddy was said to have been found motherless and alone outside the Park gate. He was promptly adopted by the girls, brought to Melbourne and, with the special permission of the Chief Inspector of Fisheries and Game, installed in comparative luxury in the spacious garden of a home in Hawthorn. He made several appearances at the Wildflower and Nature Shows staged by the Club and he was, of course, the centre of attraction. The reason given for his more or less benignant durance lay in the opportunity it presented for a study of the selective feeding habits of koalas.

The subsequent history of the little koala, 'Teddy Dincombe' is, so to say, shrouded in mystery but very likely he ended his life in the Melbourne Zoo.

The affair of Teddy resulted in a tightening of the administration of the Game Laws insofar as they affected the National Park and its Committee of Management.

The ranger at the time of the Girls' camp-out was W.J. Cripps, who was shortly after appointed an Honorary Inspector of Fisheries and Game. Armed with the authority of this office he had some measure of control over those who ignored the Game Act either

within or outside the boundaries of the Park.

During the next few years the Promontory continued to draw to itself the discriminating tourist and visitor.

Whatever its vicissitudes the National Park could always do that. Those who travelled there by the Fish Creek route owe something to the mail contractors who gradually developed a motor transport service from the Creek to the River. The long beach track, later shortened by two or three miles, was in general use up to 1938 when the Country Roads Board completed a gravel surface road from the Yanakie Homestead gate right through to the Darby. In this same year – 1938 – another large bushfire burned through a large area of the Park.

In common with the managing bodies of so many other institutions the National Park Committee operated with some difficulty during the depression years of the early 1930s.

As already mentioned, the Government's annual grant ceased and the Committee was therefore unable to effect much in the way of maintenance and improvement of facilities for tourists.

How it managed at all is something of a mystery. The only sources of revenue available to it – from grazing fees, camping fees, hire of horses and the leasing of the Chalet – would have barely paid a ranger's salary.

The practice of cattle grazing in National Parks has always been controversial – the pros and cons often hotly debated or bitterly argued.

Cattle are blamed for distributing alien weeds, both noxious and otherwise.

They compete, and very effectively too, for the food which in their absence would be available for the herbivorous native fauna – insect, bird and four-footed beast alike – for which the sanctuary was established.

They trample, and often enough destroy, vegetation to a degree which severely affects the prospects of survival of certain species. Their gregarious habits lead to a swift alteration in the soil structure of the pastures on which they graze and to a resultant radical change in the actual composition of the plant communities which inhabit the grazed areas.

In all these respects sheep have an even worse reputation but, to the credit of the Committee of Management, sheep grazing was never at any time permitted as a business, although some of the rangers were allowed to keep a small number for killing.

Finally, the presence of cattle has always been an encouragement to the grazier to carry out pre-summer and late-autumn 'burns' to rid the land of useless native vegetation so that the more valued fodder plants can flourish.

On the other hand, they are valued for the money

they can earn for the licensing authority.

They put to 'good economic use' land which, on the face of it, is simply lying idle.

Not only do these grazing rights contribute to an industry of some value to the State but they ease the lot of cattlemen who, at most times, are struggling against adversity on farms which, as so often managed (even in these enlightened days), are not capable of supporting the number of stock which economic necessity demands must be carried on those farms.

Further, without regular grazing, those rich pastures in the National Park would become so lush in the spring as to constitute a serious fire hazard in the summer. Far better that the grass should be used to fatten cows than that it should go up in smoke with profit to none and loss to all.

Lastly, Committee of Management themselves were convinced that if there was to be any cattle grazing at all the man with a licence was likely to be a better guardian of the countryside he uses for profit than the man who slips in his cattle surreptitiously and illegally.

The conviction was not altogether well founded.

Naturalists, wildlife conservators and informed national park authorities do not favour the practice.

It is no longer countenanced at Wilsons Promontory National Park although, because there is now no boundary fence separating Yanakie Common from the Park, and no gate at the Darby River bridge – not even a cattle grid – and too few rangers to supervise the comings and goings of the cattle from the Common, the beasts readily find their way into the Park. Even as recently as the 1960s, there were usually a few adorning the Darby River flats to welcome visitors to this famous sanctuary for native fauna and flora.

The fires which have invaded the Park with some regularity have done far more harm than any of the grazing to which it has been subjected but the thought is ever present in the minds of many that the fires might have been far less frequent had there been no cattle grazing.

In 1920 the granite mountains were burned almost bare by fire. The sweat and energy dissipated by the ranger and his assistants in cutting tracks across some of them might have been saved had they waited a few months. Where previously it had been a day's hard labour to travel three or four miles through the tangle of bush in some parts of the Park the fire made it so easy that a horse could trot with little trouble over the bald waste.

Another big fire came in 1926, another in 1938 and yet another in 1940 but the greatest came in February 1951 when 75,000 acres of the Park were laid waste.

In 1961 several thousand acres between the



Prom visitor and reluctant Chalet horse, 1920s.

Photo courtesy Historic Places, Department of Sustainability and Environment, Victoria

Darby River and the Darby Saddle were swept and in the Easter period of 1962 about 30,000 acres of the Singapore Peninsula-Barry's Hill district were again burned.

Even the most resilient species of animal and the most fire-resistant plant cannot withstand such frequent holocausts. Nor can the visitor feel entirely comfortable while there is no assurance that it will not happen again – with him in the middle of it. The hazard has been one with which no Committee of Management could have possibly coped.

As folk in settled places well know, fire prevention and measures for fire control and fire fighting are things to be highly organised.

Such measures require an amount of labour and equipment far beyond the scope and capacity to provide by a few citizens operating on a shoe-string budget. In fact, because the Park is the property of all the people, it is at last recognised that its protection is the responsibility of everyone.

Today circumstances have changed to an extent that lessens the hazard that formerly existed. The people's National Parks Service endeavours to ensure that fire prevention measures are not only practicable but effectively established.

Fire fighting, if needed, can be swiftly organised as

was demonstrated when the fire of autumn 1961 raged in the hills and flats southeast of the Darby River.

Perhaps, after a few decades of freedom from fire, a lot of the vegetation will have developed to a condition where the fire-prone scrub and grasslands will have disappeared to be replaced by the safer park-like forests and timbered plains which were so much admired by Mueller and his contemporaries more than a century ago. Nature has a way of healing her wounds and she may do it well enough if man can be persuaded to refrain from interfering too much.

Sometimes, of course, other agencies hinder the process and the rabbit is one of them.

That animal which gained entry to the Park about 1920 (despite the fence) had, within a few years, colonised the vulnerable sandhills near the Chalet and elsewhere. It was often to be seen grazing contentedly on the grassy plains which extend north from the Darby to Corner Basin.

Its presence in the Park has had the usual result of either initiating or accelerating erosion as well as of taking food from the mouths of the native herbivores – kangaroo, wallaby and wombat. The advent of modern control measures, if wisely applied, may lessen the problems of the future but nothing less than a miracle will exterminate them without exterminating the native

animals too. The most that can be hoped for is to keep their number in check. Fires will never be eliminated either but their effect can be mitigated.

The presence of horses in the Park has never aroused as much criticism as has been levelled at the presence of cattle and other aliens. They were there as working animals and when not actually working were confined to set grazing paddocks. In any case there were never enough of them to do much damage.

When the Chalet began to operate more horses were brought in to supplement the five or six used for pack and patrol work, so that during the 'season' as many as twenty would be available for the use of visitors. One of the duties of the men stationed at the Darby was to look after and hire out the riding hacks and pack horses to those who wanted to travel wherever a horse would take them – to Sealers Cove, Refuge Cove, the Lighthouse, Barry's Hill, the Vereker Range or Singapore Peninsula.

The tracks were generally kept in good condition and the horses were always ready for a sally to distant places.

One of the highlights of a holiday on the Prom. was an organised conducted trip over one or other of the more popular trails with the pleasure of an overnight camp at the hut at Sealers Cove, Titania Creek or Oberon Bay. These had been built in 1926 and were kept supplied with cooking equipment for the campers and fodder for the horses.

Those accustomed to horses organised their own itineraries and, like the rangers, relied on the good sense of their horses to bring them back safe and sound after a climb over the Bad Saddle or a gallop along the firm sands of Sealers Cove or Oberon Bay. Those happy days came to an end when the Chalet closed in 1942. The horses, like the huts, have now vanished from the scene but, while they existed, many outlying parts of the Promontory, now hardly known, were frequently visited and the huts made the lot of the bushwalker a good deal easier.

A horse in the National Park is a thing of the past. The ranger on patrol uses a Land Rover.

Those were the days when the Committee of Management kept a watchful eye on the plants and animals it had caused to be introduced. For example, the palms planted in Lilly Pilly Gully in 1917 were seen to be still flourishing in 1924 and Secretary Kershaw was quite certain that the lyrebirds were well established at Sealers Cove. A further lot had been liberated there in the winter of 1920 so possibly those were the birds he heard. Those brought in in 1917 appeared to have gone the way of all flesh. The writer of a leaflet distributed by the Tourist Bureau in 1939 had no doubts about its existence in the Park at that time for he wrote:

"In the forest country along Vereker Range and near the track leading eastward across the Promontory to Sealers' Cove, the mimicry of the lyre-bird enthrals the tourist who visits this garden of Nature."

There was one species of bird which the tourist or anyone else was unlikely to see on the Promontory – the Mallee Fowl. Perhaps the oddest experiment in acclimatisation to have been attempted by the Committee was the transfer of the Lowan from its inland mallee habitat to the southern extremity of the State where the annual rainfall was so much higher and the mean winter temperature so much lower than in the mallee regions of the northwest. Needless to say, the birds, after liberation, were never seen again on the Promontory.

Writing to the secretary of the Field Naturalists' Club in 1943 Kershaw mentioned that, including the initial introductions in 1911, twenty native species of mammal, nine species of native bird and some sixty species of native plant had been brought into the Park up to that time.

Plans for continuing the project were postponed and ultimately abandoned soon after the commencement of the Second World War. After the memorable years of 'business as usual' the impact of the war began to be felt and by 1942 the Committee's problems were over for a while. The Park was closed to the public and occupied by A.M.F. as a training centre for the Independent Companies (Australia's commando forces) and later by the Guerrilla [Commando] Warfare School.

Naturalists were worried about the fate of the fauna and flora of the Park during this period of occupation.

Commandos and Guerrilla fighters are not expected nor are they trained to be particularly sensitive about killing things, hence there were fears that very little of the native fauna would be left by the time the army had finished with the Park.

When it was returned to the people in 1946 and re-opened to civilians, impressions were hardly encouraging. The old Chalet was uninhabitable; the animal-proof fence was no longer functional; scarcely a beast was to be discovered and havoc had been wrought in the old familiar haunts.

The road through to Tidal River from the Darby had been improved and it led to what had been the Companies' base camp. Even here sanitary conditions (from the point of view of the general civilian public) were sub-standard and, for some time, only day visitors were allowed into the National Park but, following a good deal of tidying up, the entry permit system was revived and, once again, tourists began to visit the Park—this time to Tidal River. Here the former military establishment had been converted for civilian purposes and several cabins and cottages were opened for the

use of visitors. In the years following its re-opening to the public the Park became increasingly popular as a tourist resort and visitors began to flock to Tidal River.

The Darby and its Chalet have become but a nostalgic memory. Eventually the buildings at the little settlement were completely demolished, leaving as reminders of their existence only the concrete bases on which they stood.

The area itself is neglected by most travellers as they now hasten on their way to a now well-regulated establishment at Tidal River.

Perhaps the pressure of the seasonal population there may bring about the resurrection of the Darby River settlement someday.

Good accommodation for those who cannot or prefer not to camp is something that is much needed if the glories of Wilsons Promontory are to be shared by some of the thousands who are entitled to visit the National Park. The several cottages, flats and cabins at Tidal River have become inadequate for the number who clamour for them; so much so that, for the regular holiday seasons, they are allotted by ballot. Even caravanners and tent campers are finding it hard to secure a niche in the camping area but, to extend it to all comers, would do only further harm to the diminishing naturalness of the surroundings.

The reasonableness of this opinion will be recognised when one examines the statistics furnished by the National Parks Authority in one of its annual reports.

In the year 1958–59 Tidal River was visited by nearly 28,000 people. In the following year more than 29,500 people came. During 1960–61 there were 38,000 and in 1961–62 the number had grown to 47,000. At this rate of increase the Committee of Management expected to have to cater for 100,000 visitors in the year 1967–68, about half of that number invading the place during the months of December and January.

If the pressure of invasions of this dimension cannot be channelled into other national parks and tourist resorts the very least that can be done is to create another tourist village for those who cannot gain admittance to the Tidal River camp.

Where should such a place be established – if at all?

At the Darby again? But why not at the site of Seaforth or somewhere else on the Singapore Peninsula?

That part of the Park needs some supervision. Although remote from Tidal River it is close to a number of settlements on the mainland from Foster to Welshpool from whence many a party sallies across to the Peninsula for a day's unsupervised and uninhibited enjoyment.

Its scenery is superb, its beaches innumerable,

its potential for the tourist, walker and naturalist exceptional. It was the area chosen for the Chalet by the Toora Progress Association many years ago.

There is a school of thought which believes that the damage or destruction of scenery caused by concentrations of mankind is best confined.

Two tourist villages on the Promontory would only result in the defacement of the natural scenery in two localities instead of one. The less cynical believe that, since this national park (like every other national park) was established for the enjoyment and edification of all who look for enjoyment and edification, all such people are entitled to share it.

One likes to believe that every visitor to a national park realises that the measure of enjoyment available to the other fellow is governed by what has been left for him to enjoy. It can be taken as an axiom that the intrinsic attractions of the National Park lie in its unspoiled scenery and its content of native wildlife. These are the things, really, for which the Park has been set aside to protect and preserve so that all men in all generations may benefit from the aesthetic and spiritual satisfaction which can be derived from them.

How much of Wilsons Promontory National Park can be spared to the visitor? How many visitors can be accommodated within its boundaries at any one time without irreparable damaging or destroying that which they seek to see and enjoy? These are questions which now may seem a little academic but for which, in the decades ahead, an answer must be found.

Naturalists and other well-wishers of the National Park may well pray that a little of the wisdom of Solomon will flow from the Committee of Management through the National Parks Authority to the Government so that whatever is done to preserve and protect this 'Cornwall of Victoria' will be done well and enduringly.

Although its rocks will outlive the years, that which clothes them and adorns them, and that which dwells among them, may easily pass away, its passing, for a time, unnoticed.