



Wilsons Promontory National Park today. Map courtesy Parks Victoria.

4 A History of Wilsons Promontory

Foreword by Victorian National Parks Association

John Roslyn Garnet (1906–1998), known as Ros., was a scientist who had a distinguished career with the Commonwealth Serum Laboratories. Through his connection with the Field Naturalists Club of Victoria, he was one of the founders of the Victorian National Parks Association (VNPA) and its honorary secretary for 21 years from its establishment in 1952. In 1982 he was awarded an Order of Australia (AM) for services to conservation.



Ros Garnet c. 1970.

He had a particular interest in the flora, fauna and human history of Wilsons Promontory National Park, one of Victoria's most loved natural icons and the southernmost part of the Australian mainland. Over several decades he researched the history of 'the Prom' (as it is affectionately known to Victorians) and wrote the text for a book on the subject which he completed in the early 1980s and hoped to publish. This did not eventuate, but the text has now been placed on the web as a useful reference for anyone researching the fascinating history of Wilsons Promontory and as a tribute to Ros.

In addition to Ros's text, there is a history of Wilsons Promontory during the Second World War (1939-45) by teacher and historian Terry Synan, and an account by Daniel Catrice, formerly Historian with the Victorian Department of Sustainability and Environment, of the Prom's history from 1945 to 1998. The latter year was the centenary of the park's establishment.

Ros. Garnet's text is reproduced in its original form with minor corrections of typing and grammatical errors but no revisions. Ros. did not record all the sources of his history and so it cannot be easily checked. However, it contains much interesting and valuable information not readily available elsewhere.

It should be noted that Ros. included a chapter on the Aboriginal history of the Promontory but added

a later hand-written note that the chapter should be revised. He was unable to carry out this revision, and as the existing text would need considerable updating it has been omitted.

We hope to add a revised chapter on Aboriginal history at a later date and wish to acknowledge the traditional owners of the Promontory (which was known to Indigenous people as Yiruk or Wamoom), the importance of its many thousands of years of Aboriginal history, and the ongoing involvement of local Aboriginal communities with the national park.

Chapters on the geology and flora of the Prom have also been omitted. The geology story has been partly superseded by later research, and the flora material is included in Ros's book *The Wildflowers of Wilsons Promontory*.

The VNPA gratefully acknowledges the work of Leon Costermans, who transcribed Ros. Garnet's original typewritten text into digital text, and of Gwenyth Vivien, who carried out some preliminary editing and correcting of the text.

We encourage readers who would like to help look after Wilsons Promontory National Park to contact the Friends of the Prom, who carry out regular surveys and working bees in the park. See www.friendsoftheprom.org.au or phone (03) 9752 3846. More information about the Prom can be found on Parks Victoria's website www.parkweb.vic.gov.au.

Please note that the VNPA does not accept any responsibility or liability for omissions or errors of fact or interpretation in the attached documents on the history of Wilsons Promontory. Copyright in Ros. Garnet's History rests with the VNPA; copyright of the documents by Terry Synan and Daniel Catrice rests with the respective authors.

For more information please see our website, www.vnpa.org.au, or contact us on (03) 9347 5188, email vnpa@vnpa.org.au.

Matt Ruchel
Executive Director VNPA
April 2009

Acknowledgements, Preface, Introduction by J. Ros. Garnet

This book is dedicated to my wife and to all those who love their native land enough to want its wildlife always to have a place in it.

—J. Ros. Garnet

Acknowledgements

The compilation of a book of this kind would not have been possible without the help of hosts of people, both living and dead, but it is the living who deserve particular acknowledgement for the help they have given me during the years I have been occupied in preparing it.

I have never ceased to marvel at the amiability and courtesy of my informants and at the endurance of friends who have allowed themselves to be put to vast trouble in verifying facts and correcting errors which arise from ignorance or doubt.

In naming them individually and collectively I wish it to be recognised that whatever errors have persisted are due not to them but to me. Such people and institutions include the late Mr W Baragwanath, OBE, former Director of Mines; Mr Alex Burns, formerly Assistant Director and Curator of Insects at the National Museum of Victoria; Mr Fred Cripps of Toora; Mr Jock Greenaway of Hedley; the late Mrs Susan Greenaway of Hedley; Mr A C Hellison of Fish Creek, formerly District Land Officer in charge of the Yanakie Run; Mr J S Henthorn, leader of the MCEGS expedition to Refuge Cove in 1960-61; Mr J Lester of Shallow Inlet; Mr David Morgan of Melbourne; Mr Douglas Robertson of Reservoir; Mr Charles Rossiter of Hedley; Mr Alex. Selby of Gunbower Estate; Mr Harold Tarr of Melbourne; the Committee of Management of Wilsons Promontory National Park and especially its former Secretary, Mr E Kennedy and its members Mr J G Jones of Foster, a former Councillor of the Shire of South Gippsland and Mr W J Northey, a former officer of the Lands Department; the Fisheries and Wildlife Department, Melbourne; the Field Naturalists' Club of Victoria; the Department of Land and Survey and the Central Plans Office of that Department, especially Mr R Spreadborough; members of the McCoy Society; the Melbourne Walking Club; the National Herbarium, Melbourne, especially Mr James Willis, Assistant Government Botanist; the National Museum of Victoria, and Mrs Hope Black, formerly Curator of Molluscs; the National Parks Authority and, of course, the Victorian State Library.

One no less deserving of credit is my wife, who has displayed admirable forbearance amidst what often must have seemed, to one of her tidy disposition, a litter of papers, books, maps and files in unlikely places around the house, who has listened uncomplainingly to the interminable clatter of the typewriter, who has

shared my many excursions to South Gippsland and the Promontory, and who has, I hope, long since forgiven me for getting bogged in a morass (which has since been made negotiable by vehicle) at Chinaman's Creek and, the very next day, in sand near the shore of Corner Basin.

Preface

My interest in Wilsons Promontory was first aroused by an uncle and aunt who had spent several months in the national park. My uncle, during the First World War, had been gassed—by chlorine or phosgene I suppose—and, in the belief that active life in the open air would help to repair the damage, he became one of the Park rangers in the spring of 1919. With his sister he was installed at a cottage at Barrys Hill.

Although their stay on the Prom was all too short, it left happy memories which were reflected in the tales they told of their delight at being able to dwell in such surroundings—where lovable creatures were free to live as nature ordained, where wildflowers flourished in almost mad confusion, unrestrained by at least some of the hazards which beset them elsewhere.

Place names such as Barrys Creek, Bennison, Corner Inlet, the Darby and Mount Vereker and personalities such as Bill Cripps, Professor Ewart, Jimmy Kershaw and Baldwin Spencer began to mean something to an impressionable youth who had been born in Gippsland and remembered enough of the wonder of the bush and the mighty forests of the Strzelecki Ranges to be able to form some kind of mental picture of the place about which they spoke.

Later on, in my student days, I determined to see the Promontory for myself so, during the summer vacation of 1924, I set out on my bicycle on my first grand tour. Rather inadequately equipped with a light canvas sleeping bag, a rug and a collection of food, clothes and anything else likely to be of use that could be crammed into a shoulder pack, I set off. Among the inadequacies was money which, in those days, was for me in short supply.

Bitumen roads were uncommon in the 1920s but, by way of compensation, so were motor cars. Indeed, after passing Leongatha, I had the dusty and bumpy road to myself. Cycling along that road in the heat of a summer day is something which only the youthful and carefree could really enjoy. The exhilaration of spinning quietly along the bush roads and tracks, breathing the scent of eucalypts and other aromatic trees and shrubs, listening to the murmur of insects on the wing, the drumming of cicadas and the calls of birds is something which will linger much longer in my memory than the discomfort of heat, dust and flies.

The ride had its retrospectively comic moments. Having breasted a rise somewhere between Buffalo and Boys I have a clear recollection of 'free-wheeling' down the hill and bringing the bike to a sudden stop because a big black snake was crossing the road. I jumped off, seized the nearest stick I could see in the hurry of the moment and lunged at the reptile. In my anxiety to kill the poor beast before it could glide on its peaceful way into the ferns by the roadside I fell flat on my face beside the departing snake. Doubtless it was more concerned for its own safety than about me. It kept gliding until it vanished from view. I have since learned to be rather more careful in approaching snakes and I no longer have the urge to kill them merely because they happen to be in sight.

In the late afternoon I reached Winchester's cottage at Shallow Inlet. The place was lively with both dogs and fleas but the brothers were hospitality itself. They were out fishing when I arrived so I spent some time watching what must have been thousands of black swans feeding in the shallows of the Inlet. It was an unforgettable sight to see such flocks of these graceful birds silhouetted against the gently lapping waves—coloured by shafts of gold and crimson from the rays of the setting sun.

Early next morning I dragged the bike across the Hummocks on to the hard beach and set off for the Darby River along a track I have never again had to travel. On the occasions of my next visit there was a sandy bridle path through the heathlands of the Yanakie Isthmus. It joined the old track where it emerged from Cotters Lake which it crossed or skirted according to the season—whether it held water or didn't. Being summer time the 'lake' was, on this occasion, dry and criss-crossed with paths formed by the cattle that grazed on this part of the old Yanakie Run. From here half an hour's hard pedalling through the dune sand brought me to the river where I camped among the dense tea tree scrub which then existed along the north bank. I soon made myself known to the ranger, Viv. Weston, whose help and good advice made my visit much more profitable than otherwise it might have been. I soon learned that a bicycle was of limited use in exploring the tracks and bridle paths that then existed in the National Park. A trip into Lilly Pilly Gully demonstrated its limitations. Thereafter my journeys were on foot—to Tongue Point, Sealers Cove, the Vereker Landing, to the top of Vereker itself and to Barrys Creek where I stayed overnight in the then vacant cottage that had been the headquarters of my uncle and aunt. Weston had given me the key to the cottage and, rather unnecessarily, a heavy waxed-canvas groundsheet which I lugged the twenty-eight miles there and back in the heat of summer. I didn't realise how superfluous it was until I reached the cottage which was adequately

supplied with beds and blankets. However, I expect Viv considered that my thin canvas sleeping bag would be of little use should a storm blow up and I had to camp out along the track.

The 'Prom' was all that I had imagined. Animals large and small—koalas, wallabies, echidnas, lizards, emus and birds of lesser stature were plentiful. Most of the wildflowers (which I then knew little about anyway) had withered with the advancing summer but the fern gullies were as green and refreshing as ever, reminding me of the shady glens along the creek that ran through the farm where I had spent my first nine years—a fern gully now quite obliterated by the march of progress and in which dwelt lyrebirds, satin bower birds, platypus and wombat.

This one week of solitary rambling in the National Park was an experience never to be forgotten. It whetted my appetite for more. I have been back—with long intervals between visits—and, on each occasion, have noted the changes that have taken place over the years. Some of them have not been always to the advantage or benefit of the Park and its visitors.

Since that first solo excursion in 1924, I have pushed a bicycle from one end of Victoria to the other, walked to places where a bike could not carry me and, in more recent years, travelled the easy way and in better company to the lesser known scenic places in Victoria and to places beyond its borders but I have yet to find a spot with quite the same appeal as Wilsons Promontory National Park. It is the place that taught me to understand the real purpose of those who, for so long, fought to have it dedicated as a National Park. Yes, they were idealists. But without such men to provoke the vision of a retreat for those who hunger for the mental refreshment, relaxation and inspiration which it can provide we would be a sorry crowd indeed. As I came to know the Promontory better I began to understand that, popular as it now is, it needed interpreting to as many as would care to listen. As a nature reserve it has suffered sadly at the hands of its owners—mostly from well meant intentions but not inconsiderably from outright exploiters of its natural assets. But what place of any scenic merit has not?

How best could it be interpreted? Who would be the interpreter? This book is the answer to those questions but whether it answers them adequately is quite another matter. I can only hope that it will help to do so. To me the history of an object is, often enough, much more interesting than the object itself. The object is valued not so much for its intrinsic worth but for the associations which attach to it; and, so it is with the 'Prom'. To know something of its origin and evolution is to be better equipped to interpret it sympathetically. Having served my time as a professional scientist and

being, by inclination (among other things), a field naturalist, I have used the opportunity the compilation of this book has offered me of including as much information as I could glean about the natural history of the place. The result has been that the original idea of a small handbook of the kind that Professor Ewart had in mind in 1912 has outgrown itself. I found it quite impossible to deal briefly with the chronological and natural history of this national park. There was too much to tell and too much to talk about but I hope that, in the telling, I will have managed to transmit to the reader some of the interest and enthusiasm for this and every other of our great nature conservation reserves which has held me enthralled for more than two thirds of a lifetime. I have long since learned that no nature conservation reserve needs 'developing'. They all need expert management and that sort of management requires that they be maintained in as natural a state as is humanly possible for them to be kept. Catering for an unrestricted flow of visitors is not a sign of good management although it may well be profitable for those few who may engage in the catering. When one expresses such an opinion there is almost always a prompt reaction from the thoughtless or self-interested. The catch phrase of such people is 'locking up'. Naturalists want to 'lock up' the national parks. They want to keep out all but themselves. How silly!

Not long after the establishment of the National Parks Authority in 1956 one of its members who spoke as an agriculturalist was reported as having claimed that he was not interested in nature protection and that if he thought Wilsons Promontory was to be closed or diminished in area he would rather see the place turned over to agriculture than have its vast acres locked away from the public. It was one of the misfortunes of the Authority that men of such a turn of mind should have felt obliged to remain a member of a team whose first duty, according to the National Parks Act, is 'to maintain every national park in its natural condition and to conserve therein ecological associations and species of plants and animals and protect the special features of the parks'.

If this object is to be met, entry into any nature reserve ought to be restricted, naturalists being 'locked out' along with the rest. In passing, it might be noted that it is not possible to distinguish a naturalist from other kinds of people—by inspections at any rate.

National Parks are not for loungers. They are not designed for the socialite. Such folk would be far happier in places more suited to their needs. The tendency to cater for them is not due to any special solicitude for them but rather for the money they can drop into the waiting hands of the developers. Happily the philosophy governing the management of our national parks now recognises that expensive hotels are

not a necessity in a nature conservation reserve; nor are sports grounds of any kind.

You, my reader, will have noted that I do not favour the kind of developments that have been urged from time to time for such national parks as Wilsons Promontory and Mount Buffalo. I enjoy liquor as much as anyone else but I have never found it essential to my enjoyment of a holiday in the parks. I like deep-piled carpets and other manifestations of gracious living as much as the next man but I can still enjoy a holiday away from such amenities, and there are hundreds of thousands of people of like mind. There is not room for all of us at any one time, so why let the place be destroyed in order to please the few who cannot bear to do without these things? By discouraging them one is doing a good turn to the less pretentious folk who want to use the parks in a legitimate way.

Those who thrive on mountaineering have, on the Promontory, all the climbing they could wish for. Those who exhaust their wonderment on scenery have ample scope there. The park is made for the photographer, for the artist and for the outdoor man and woman. One does not have to be an athlete or a spartan to enjoy what it has to offer. I have been lame since the polio epidemic of 1918 but the ensuing disability has not greatly hindered me from exploring its high mountains and its many other scenic places. The light disability might even have been an advantage. Perhaps my slower rate of travel gave me more time to see what was to be seen. This, coupled with an infinite curiosity to know about the world around me, will surely explain the genesis of my enthusiasm for national parks and for all they are intended to represent.

It may explain, too, my sorrow and feelings of utter frustration when confronted with the witless work of the vandal and the desecration of scenic places by official bodies and private citizens alike—man-made excrescences on the highest places in the landscape, roads which, from a vantage point, are and look like scarified wounds on the surface of the earth, gravel pits that look like ulcers, strings of pylons on contours that reveal them in their supreme ugliness, bulldozed and broken trees by the wayside, rubbish dumps, bottles broken and unbroken, tins rusted and unrusted, empty oil drums, cartons and all the rest of it—sometimes concealed but just as often dumped by the roadside for all to see—buildings in places where they should never have been built and even buildings that should never have been built at all. These are all contributions to what Robin Boyd has called 'the great Australian ugliness'. My frustration lie in the fact that education is such a slow process that there is an eternal supply of human beings who need it badly, even if it only serves to teach them the golden rule.

In terms of goods and chattels we are reckoned to be a wealthy nation but there seem to be far too many of us who are more than anxious to reap the harvest of nature without caring a bit about the share the next generation—and the one after that—might want to enjoy. If the proportion remains constant the conservators of the future will have an even more uphill struggle than the conservators of yesterday and today. They will have to fight hard to keep the developers at bay.

The national park concept is now practically universally accepted. Each country has evolved its own standards for its national parks but no matter how the people or what the country all agree on one thing—they are places set apart for the conservation and protection of nature. To what extent the aim is achieved is largely governed by the size of the reserve and its accessibility. If there is to be a reasonable prospect of it fulfilling its purpose for the conservation of the inhabiting wildlife a national park must be extensive. Small areas may be useful for preserving geological features or distinctive land forms, but the wildlife of such areas is vulnerable to the influences of settled places on the periphery. This will be easily appreciated when one realises that a distance of just 500 metres separates the centre of a 10 ha reserve from its boundary.

A problem that confronts the managers of large national parks is that of providing accommodation and all the ancillary amenities for the visitors who may wish to explore the place. What is done in other countries and even in other Australian states is not necessarily the best practice and, within our own state, what is proper for one national park is not inevitably the practice to be followed in another. Each park is, practically by definition, unique, and requires to be treated accordingly.

This book attempts to show wherein lies the uniqueness of Wilsons Promontory National Park and, having read it, the still unwearied reader will be in a better position than others to decide for himself whether or not the Tidal River tourist village would have been better at or even outside the boundary of the Park.

*J Ros. Garnet
Melbourne, 1981*

Introduction by J. Ros. Garnet

A map of Victoria will show, away to the south-east of Melbourne, a large tongue of land projecting into Bass Strait. Its tip is the southernmost point on the coastline of the Australian continent. This tongue, embracing some 49,000 hectares, is Wilsons Promontory National Park—a place that is something of a wonderland for

people of all sorts of tastes.

The approach by land is through the Yanakie Isthmus, which connects the Promontory to the mainland.

At one time this isthmus was one of the valleys in a system of ranges that extended across what is now Bass Strait, linking Tasmania with the continent. With the passing of time, submergence of the land left little more than the mountain tops above the level of the sea. These are now seen as the several islands of Bass Strait and the numerous islets off the shores of the Promontory. The Promontory itself is considered to be the remnant of an ancient Bunurong Range which joined the continent and Tasmania. The isthmus sank with the rest of the land and the Promontory remained as an island.

A combination of circumstances such as deposition from sluggish tides in the shallows of the present Corner Basin, from erosion of the adjacent higher ground and the accretion of wind-blown sand gradually converted the shallows of the miniature strait which separated the island 'promontory' from the northern rises to a swampy estuary which has gradually and completely filled up and reconnected the promontory to the mainland. Thus its geological history had made Yanakie Isthmus an area of special interest because, there, one may see the evidence of some of the physiographic changes that have occurred in the past.

On the mid-west side of the isthmus is Shallow Inlet, a place frequented by sea birds and waders, black swans—sometimes in thousands—and hosts of other interesting fauna, including the now-rare Cape Barren goose, while on the east side is Corner Inlet, or as it is more properly named Corner Basin, with its complement of little islands, shallows and mangrove fringes. The Isthmus has been a region much favoured for grazing cattle—an industry begun as long ago as 1843 or 1844. Despite the incessant munching of countless generations of cattle and the regularity of the summer and autumn fires to which it has been subjected, the Yanakie heathlands and sand dunes continue to harbour a rich variety of native plant and animal wildlife which, in many ways, has no counterpart on the Promontory itself.

It is different because its geological history is different. A considerable part of the isthmus, instead of being included in the national park, was alienated and developed as productive farmland, but good luck rather than good planning ensured that much of the southern sector of the isthmus remained as Crown land. In recent times public attitudes to nature conservation have changed to a degree that has persuaded the government to incorporate this southern sector of Yanakie Isthmus into the National Park. The entrance to the Park is now some 20km nearer Melbourne than it

was when the Darby River was the point of entry. The inclusions of Yanakie South as an integral part of the park was not achieved without some concession being made to those who, for generations, had grazed their cattle on its age-old dunes, swamps and heathlands. The cattle are to be permitted to remain, but under rather more stringent control. [Cattle grazing in this area ended in the early 1990s – Ed.]

The appearance of the former entrance at the Darby River has changed almost beyond recognition since the days when it was the hub of tourist activity in the Park. In former times a chalet nestled on the river flat at the foot of Darby Hill, which is the western extension of the LaTrobe Range. Little now remains to remind one of this once-popular holiday rendezvous. It belonged to an era when there were no surfaced roads through the Yanakie Isthmus. One waited till the tide was on the ebb and then sped swiftly and quietly along the hard sandy beach of Waratah Bay, from Winchester's camp on Shallow Inlet to Buckley's Rocks, where the traveller turned inland to skirt or cross Cotter's Lagoon.

By following a sandy track for a kilometre or so, travellers entered a bushland of banksia, sheoak, tea-tree and honey-myrtle, wound their way along the troughs of the dunes and headed southward towards the river. A rough bridge spanned the stream at a point a little further downstream from the site of the present bridge, and from it one passed through an avenue of tea-tree and honey-myrtle to the chalet or camp site. Were one on a walking trip one simply scrambled over Buckley's Rocks and followed the shoreline to the mouth of the Darby River, walking through it at low tide or wading at high tide. A final scramble over the mobile dunes and further walk of less than a kilometre through a tunnel of trees and shrubs along the course of the river brought one to a recognised camping ground where, in due time, the chalet was to be built.

Those who knew this route are richer for the memories of an exhilarating experience of scudding along this moist, sandy speedway, the incautious dallying on the way even at the risk of being caught by an incoming tide. There was always plenty to see—myriads of small sand crabs, birds of one sort or another, even an occasional nautilus shell after a southerly blow.

There was, of course, the hazard of the Hummocks. The track through them was easily negotiable provided the wind had not deposited too much fine sand on top. Unless travellers knew just where the track lay in a sea of sand, they could easily get trapped. Many did. In the course of fifty years the sea has scoured away much of the original beach at the Hummocks and one can now see some of the wooden sleepers that formed a safe track for wheeled vehicles protruding midway up a low bank of sand that now forms the shoreline.

It was an adventure getting to the Darby in those days. Even the alternative route across Corner Basin by boat from Port Franklin or Port Welshpool to the Vereker Landing jetty and then overland on foot or on horseback to the Darby was an exciting experience. It has vanished. Today, a trip to the Prom entails nothing more exciting than a drive of 250 kilometres over all-weather bitumen roads, through Fish Creek or the substantial town of Foster, over the Hoddle Ranges or the Foster Hills, down to the plain of the Yanakie isthmus, across the substantial bridge that now spans the Darby River, up and over the Darby Saddle to the terminus at Tidal River nine or ten kilometres beyond the site of the old tourist centre.

The last lap of the road, carved from the granite slopes of the Saddle, offers even the most casual of tourists moments of sheer delight. At the dawn of day or at dusk, when they emerge to browse, wallabies will surely be seen on the heathlands through which the road winds its way. Small bands of emus are to be found there too, though they are far more common on the Yanakie plains. On the same heathlands and in the thick scrub of kunzea, banksia, sheoak and stunted eucalypts, birds abound, mostly unseen except by the patient and more leisurely observer.

From the top of the Darby Saddle the seascapes and panoramas are unlikely to be soon forgotten. From such heights one gazes down on scenes of rugged grandeur—the tempestuous waters of the Southern Ocean crashing on jagged cliffs, the placid waters of little bays and coves, bays and coves less quiet with rolling surf and breakers that thunder against nearby mountains, forested valleys each with its sparkling creek, heathy moorlands, small plains, river flats and sand dunes. All are part of a picture which, to our eyes, is peculiarly Australian although, indeed, the magnificence of the scenery has been likened to the Cornish coast.

With the arrival at the mouth of Tidal River where it empties into Norman Bay, the scene changes to that of a thriving village where will be found enough modern amenities to dispel any fleeting illusions of isolation in a primaeval world. Here are flats, cottages and cabins for hire, serviced with fresh water, refrigeration, electricity, gas cooking appliances and the rest of the simple comforts a modern holiday maker has come to expect. A nearby shop and a cafe provide for the everyday needs of a traveller or tourist while campers can tuck tent or car (or caravan) snugly into a space amid the tea tree on the outskirts of the settlement. From here they can repair to the cafe and restaurant for meals.

A holiday on the Promontory can be fashioned to suit one's inclinations whether they be lazy and carefree or active and equally carefree. For the less active there are tracks for quiet rambles to nearby pleasant spots— to

the shallows of Tidal River for a swim, to Squeaky Beach on Leonard Bay to hear the musical sands resonating at each footfall, to Pillar Point for the entrancing vistas, to the Aboriginal kitchen middens by the shore of Oberon Bay or, in the warmth of a summer's day, to just laze on the broad, clean beach.

It is not easy, now, to envisage the 'Prom' as it once was—a veritable hive of human activity, more particularly on its north-eastern and eastern sides where there were timbermen, dingo hunters, fishermen, prospectors, miners, sealers and men of many other callings and occupations, all busy on their more or less lawful activities. In those far-off days tracks were many and well defined. The successions of disastrous bushfires and the effluxion of time have obliterated many of those which were so well known to bush walkers of years gone by. The tangle of undergrowth and scrub that invariably follows bushfires in this region of Victoria is likely to prove too much for most walkers and hikers, and so it will remain for a decade or two when, perhaps, in the absence of further burns, a new forest will arise and the undergrowth will fade away.

Even if, today, much of the east coast is denied to most visitors, there is still plenty to be seen and enjoyed on the western and southern coasts. From Tidal River tracks radiate to some of the most scenic parts of the Promontory, and the sturdy walker may still show his or her mettle in a trip to the lighthouse at the southern extremity of the park or in a ramble over rugged Mount Oberon which towers its granite mass 600 metres above the Southern Ocean.

The highest peak is Mount LaTrobe, 750 metres above sea level, a peak which one sees away to the north-east as one scrambles over the Oberon Saddle. But LaTrobe is only one of several mountains in the Park that rise above 600 metres. From the long backbone ridge known as the Vereker Range subsidiary ranges extend to both the east and west. With such a system one can expect an abundance of valleys, each with its clear mountain stream and little waterfalls. In an environment of that kind the vegetation is sure to be rich and diversified. In fact, visitors who are at all interested in wildlife will be well satisfied with a sojourn on the Promontory.

Botanists will be rewarded with the sight of up to 700 species of native vascular plants—a number approaching a quarter of the entire vascular flora of Victoria. Some plants, like other forms of the wildlife of the park, are rare or uncommon, or perhaps even extinct as a consequence of the fires that have from time to time swept its large expanse. Koalas which once abounded, notably at Barrys Creek over on Corner Basin and at Sealers Cove on the east coast, are rare enough to be remarked upon when seen, but they are still about and appear in unexpected places such as Lilly Pilly

Gully, Pillar Point, Yanakie and Tidal River itself. Other marsupials and placentals such as wombats, possums, rodents and wallabies have spread to many parts of the park, echidnas are not uncommon and a lucky observer may even see a platypus. Some of the lesser known animals are more likely to be seen by those who like to do their exploring by spotlight. They are the species, like bats, possums and phascogales, whose daily activities begin at or soon after sunset and end at sunrise.

Alien creatures have also established themselves in the park. Apart from the cattle on Yanakie, the park is now the home of the little Hog Deer which are sometimes seen browsing around the settlement at Tidal River, the fox which has successfully resisted all efforts directed towards its extirpation, the rabbit which is probably there to stay despite continuing control programs, an occasional goat—perhaps by now, discovered and despatched—and, of course, the domestic cat gone wild. Wild dogs seem no longer to be a problem. Among the couple of hundred species of birds seen on the Promontory from time to time, no trouble will be experienced in recognising the introduced starling, blackbird and sparrow which are multiplying at the expense of native birds. Starlings have been there for nearly a century but blackbirds were first seen there in 1925. Like rabbits, they are there to stay. A goat, by the way, was last seen by the writer in October 1961. It is believed that he (or she) was one of a small herd (or a descendant thereof) that escaped from the lighthouse reserve when the fence of that enclosure was destroyed during the great 1951 bushfire. The animal seen ten years later had travelled the length of the Promontory to the Beehives on the shore of Corner Basin!

A disturbing factor in the program of preservation of the wildlife of the Promontory has been the continuance of cattle grazing within the boundaries of the National Park. It is one which might have been avoided had those responsible for its management given rather more thought than they did to the consequences and, perhaps more importantly, had they been in a position to forego the small amount of revenue they gleaned from the practice of issuing grazing licences and leases.

The animals spread alien weeds in their wake, trampled down the vegetation of the accessible grassy flats, converted the marshlands into bogs and fouled the streams in the vicinity of the favoured grazing grounds. And, of course, the cattlemen with their horses and dogs contributed to the despoliation. To them it was scarcely noticeable because it took place so slowly. What was easily perceived was the abundance of lush, green grass that appeared after the mandatory summer and autumn fires which the cattlemen lit to 'clean up' the flats and heathy slopes so that more cattle might be

grazed. Happily, that phase of mismanagement is over for good.

Yes. Wilsons Promontory National Park, in the County of Buln Buln and the Shire of South Gippsland, is indeed a place for a holiday with a difference. Golf, tennis, football and cricket can all be forgotten there. The complications of urban life may, for a spell, become, perchance, dim memories. Neither trains nor trams (nor horses now) can be our masters there. Even the comfort of the useful motor car can be eschewed while legs once more come into their own. Eyes, tired with the glare of brick and bitumen, can regain their sparkle as they sweep the wide horizons. Lungs can breathe deeply of the salt-tanged air of the sea or the scent-laden breeze from the bush and heathland.

Wilsons Promontory National Park is yours and mine. We hold it in trust for the generations yet to come. As with each of our national parks, it is there for the education, enjoyment and edification of all people for all time, for the protection and preservation of its supreme scenery and its native plant and animal wildlife. Each of us who visits the park does so as a trustee or as an owner who wants it to retain unimpaired all those values which now appeal to us. Only care and good management can achieve this aim. Care costs nothing, but good management is obtainable only at a price. In the past Victorians have depended on the good offices of a few private citizens who strove to do what they could with what small sums they could raise to look after the state's several national parks, but today their control and management rest with a statutory National Parks Service which operates within a Ministry of Conservation. As an earnest of our part-ownership of the national parks each of us, as a taxpayer, contributes to the fund that allows the Service to operate. As far as Wilsons Promontory National Park is concerned the prime aim of the Service is to endeavour to ensure that none of the charms of the park shall be lost or diminished—and the hope is that that aim is humanly possible.

Sometimes it is difficult to reconcile the interests of visitors to the park with the requirement of nature conservation, but it is hoped that the pages that follow will lead to an understanding of the problems that beset the Service and that will continue to do so. Should it sometimes appear that its solutions to some of them favour the nature lovers and naturalists, remember that these people are ordinary citizens like us. If they differ at all in their demands it is that they demand so little—simply the right to observe Nature in all her moods in a place where those moods are ceaselessly changing and in a place meant just for that.

[The National Parks Service became part of Parks Victoria in 1996. Ed.]

