

An Irregular publication for members of the Town Planning (Research Group (not for publication or republication.)

This issue. Dear Reader; We promised that this issue would be on the Blue Dandenongs. And it is. But, since our last publication the Transportation Plan has been made public. We therefore precede our Blue Dandenong reading by a short note on how you can purchase a summary of this important Plan. Therefore in this issue.....

1. The Transportation Plan.
2. The Blue Dandenongs.

1/29/70 Transportation Plan. How You Can Be Informed on the Facts.

The Inter-Church Trade and Industry Mission combined with the Vehicle Builders Union, the Australian Railways Union, the Tramways Union, the Amalgamated Engineering Union, and the Boiler-makers and Blacksmiths Society are planning a seminar on transport later this year.

To stimulate public discussion on the Transportation Plan they are publishing Pre-seminar Bulletins. Their first issue is devoted to reporting facts and figures from the Plan.

For one dollar you can be supplied with this document. The cost of the Transportation Plan (3 volumes) is 45 dollars. So don't miss out on this one dollar bargain! Send you money to Mr. J. C. Arrowsmith, Box 12, Trades Hall, Victoria St., Carlton 3035

2/29/70 The Blue Dandenongs.

Take a day off for a trip from Croydon, through Kalorama, Olinda, Ferny Creek to Ferntree Gully. If you have time you could detour through the valleys to Kallista, Sherbrooke, Belgrave and Tecoma, but drive along the ridge from Kalorama to Sassafras,

In this issue of Irregular two valleys are described... Kalorama the view from "Fiveways" towards the Silvan; and the spot in the Dandenongs which has been immortalised on canvass Sassafras Valley.

3/29/70 Kalorama Forest Park, The Valley That Could Have Been Sub-Divided.

When you reach Fiveways, pause to enjoy the uninterrupted view of the dam, there is little to remind you that a few years ago this eastern side of Mt. Dandenong was cluttered up with an old galvanised iron ramshackle shed which was used as a bus depot and service station; and a farm propped on the grassy slopes. Thus in the past the view was dominated by property owned by the Jeeves family.... the garage of Hubert Jeeves and the farm owned by Wally Jeeves. This private property could have been subdivided into shops and home sites, if there had not existed an organisation called SAVE THE DANDEENONGS LEAGUE.

Kalorama Forest Park comprises Hubert Jeeves' land on which his garage was once sited, and below this area Wally Jeeves' farm, making a total of 54 acres.

A few years ago Hubert Jeeves had his land sub-divided into shop sites on the road frontage and building blocks lower down. It required the exercise of a good deal of diplomacy on the part of the Save the Dandenongs League and Prof. Turner in particular, to persuade Hubert Jeeves to sell the land for a reserve. His opposition to the objects of the S.D. L. were well known. It was also quite an effort on the part of S.D.L. to raise sufficient equity in order to persuade the Government to provide the balance.

The purchase price was about 32,000 dollars. Prof. Turner's efforts and the League's efforts were helped by sizeable donations from some trust monies, but the League members also contributed in small amounts.

Later Wally Jeemes' farm came on the market. The S.D.L. persuaded the Government that this property was an essential addition to the area already secured, otherwise the view would have been spoilt by a rash of houses in the middle distance.

So now the park almost adjoins the Silvan catchment, belongs to the people. It is in the care of the Forestry Commission and is managed by a committee, appointed by the Commission, which is made up of local residents, Forestry Commission representatives and the Shire Engineer.

The Future. Landscape design students from the Melbourne University have drawn plans... also a designer of some standing is interested on a voluntary basis. Toilet facilities have already been erected (well hidden from the view, but you don't see them unless you have to look!) Shelter, a picnic building, barbeque etc are to be erected "soon" on the old farm house site.

The Forestry Commission is conducting a "regeneration of native flora" experiment on a few acres that were afforested before the last bush fires.

To Sum Up The purpose of acquiring the land was to provide a general nature reservation area for day visitors from the Metropolitan area, and it will be developed as money becomes available with this end in view.

3/29/70

A Native Garden, A Bush Reserve, A Rhododendron Park.

If driving from Croydon towards Kalorama, stop for a short break at Kalorama Picnic Reserve, it is on your right, about a mile from Kalorama on the Croydon side. This is not only a sports ground, North-east of the oval the Mt. Dandenong Horticultural Society has acquired a special reserve which is now being cultivated as a native garden, where Australian native plants can grow. This is still in its infant stage and is at present fenced off from the public, but the land is already being landscaped by Ellis Stones, some planting has started and plans for a Horticultural Hall are on the drawing boards.

After you pass through Mt. Dandenong (if driving from the Croydon direction) turn right at the Log Cabin Tearooms and drive about a quarter of a mile up the Ridge Rd.; note the "rash of houses" on the subdivided farm... this was once a beautiful corner where bushland met the cultivated land of the farm.

If you can bear to continue along the suburbanised allotments edging Ridge Rd, continue to Singleton's Reserve... a delightful bush spot... here careful "cleaning up" of noxious weeds has left a pleasant stand of towering gums, mostly mountain ash.

Now back to the main Rd, if you want another detour, go down Monbulk Rd. to the National Rhododendron Gardens.

Then back to Olinda and on to Sassafras. When the view of Sassafras Gully opens before you, you may better visualise the events that took place there about eighty years ago,

4/29/70

An Obstinate Minister of Lands in 1890.

The Settlement in Sassafras Gully in 1890. An extract from "Story of the Dandenongs" by Helen Coulson (published by Cheshires)

Stark Life in the Old Bark Hut.

Such wide-spread unemployment existed in Melbourne during the 1890s that many families were on the brink of starvation. To meet the challenge the Minister of Lands, John McAntyre, conceived the idea of throwing open Crown land reservations throughout the state,

In furtherance of this scheme the Parish of Monbulk (including the present townships of Kallista, The Patch, Olinda, Sassafras, and Sherbrooke) was thrown open to selectors in 1893 and at the same time a small portion of the Parish of Scorsby, in the vicinity of Ferny Creek and Tremont was made available for private sale. The entire area was known as "The Settlement",

Perhaps the scheme was justified by the conditions prevailing at the time, but there was certainly little justification for the selection of Sassafras Creek Gully as a suitable site on which to place untried settlers, thereby destroying one of the most beautiful fern gullies within near reach of Melbourne

Cr. H. R. Kerr, one of the civic giants of the day, protested against the proposal following a visit by the Minister, who obstinately refused to inspect any other area but that in the vicinity of Sassafras and Emerald Creeks.

"I positively assert" wrote Kerr, "that the line of country proposed to be occupied is totally unsuitable for the purpose of a Village Settlement it being in a series of heavily timbered, deep, steep and abrupt gorges, very beautiful to look at and to wonder at, but unfit for needy settlers.

"There is not a patch of it could be opened up for less than £30 an acre and I believe there is not one family of those for whom it is thrown open would ever permanently settle there, and my advice is not to waste their energy, their time and capital on this utopian scheme in its present form. It occurs to me that it is not their future advantage that is being considered, but only their importunities.

"There is not a practical road in the neighbourhood, those already surveyed cannot be traversed with a 10 lb weight on a pack horse. The lowest bed of the Sassafras is about 1200 feet above sea level and it is hemmed in with mountains 500 to 600 feet higher than that. What a lovely aspect for the coming winter! I trust the Minister will be courteous enough to hold his hand until some public expression of opinion has been taken, I do not presume to question the honourable gentleman's legal right or intention to alienate what is intended to be a reserve.

"However, I with my colleagues of Fern Tree Gully Council, as guardians of the people's property in this district, claim the right to have a say on the subject of recklessly and uselessly destroying this beauty spot of Victoria, useful for recreation purposes and none other.

"Now, as the subject is of more than local interest and concerns those who toil and are tied up in towns, to them I now appeal to at once come forward and assist to protect this, their own heritage, the great National Park with its giant sassafras and fern gullies, or if not, for ever hold their peace on matters of this kind.

"The Quixotic visit of the Minister of Lands on Thursday last could not have given him much knowledge of the subject or of the

capacity of Ferntree Gully Shire, whose area is 150 square miles. It was merely an afternoon outing from one to four, therefore I again tender our assistance. "

The matter was discussed in Council the following month, when Mr. S. Crawford, Shire Secretary, described another "block of suitable country" recommended by the Council as being on the southern face of the range and adjoining the eastern portion of the area to be thrown open.... Crawford reported that this area could be thrown open "without destroying sassafras gullies that have no equal in the world!"

On this occasion the Dandenong Water Trust and the Council were in rare agreement and members of both authorities formed a deputation urging the selection of a more suitable site. Cr. J.J. Miller later reported that the deputation "could do nothing with the Minister, who was determined to open up the country of Sassafras."

Such was the haste to settle the destitute families on the land that the first settlers entered the forest and pegged out selections before the survey of the newly created Parish of Monbulk was completed.... over pegging each others territory (owing to impenetrable bush) and bitter clashes occurred.

Settlers had to reside on their blocks eight months of the year. Food (mostly dripping and potatoes) and clothes (old police uniforms) were distributed to the needy settlers.

Robert Hughes, steward (paid Government official) inspected the clearings and assessed the improvements, whereupon he issued to settlers an order to buy groceries to the amount, say 5/-. Settlers themselves handled no money, and if Hughes considered a man was justified in his desire to purchase a cow, he (Hughes) bought the animal and debited the amount against the settlers capital grant of £20. (20 pounds)

In those days, stark poverty stalked the forest and in the first two or so years, before the forest could be brought to production, settlers existed mainly on potatoes and dripping.

The apparent inhumanity of Government action in placing untried settlers on such inhospitable land was criticised alike by public and press and in consequence John McIntyre periodically visited the newly settled areas.... after which he presented glowing reports of life in the settlement, citing examples of "resourcefulness and remarkable ingenuity" people working clearing land with no tools, even concluding "There are dissatisfied parties in the community.... but their principal grievance is that they want money and do not want to work for it."

Bernie Simcox.. first settler in Monbulk said.

"The settlement of Monbulk (Parish) was a badly managed scheme by the Government and a very costly one. It was a great mistake cutting into such small blocks, which ought to have been 40 or 50 acres instead of ten. then putting men with little or no means to clear such heavily timbered country and leave them without cleared and metalled roads.

"It was a long and struggling time most of the settlers had. So long it took and so costly to clear the holdings, and when they had cleared them, they didn't know what to do to make a living out of them and as the holdings were so small, only fit for gardens, they :

usually went in for growing berries , vegies etc, anything they could get to market. but to get to market was a job. Year after year no made roads, and no metalled roads, and in winter most impassable, so that those who had to depend on others to take their stuff to market and sell it for them, did little or no good."

5/29/ '70 A Striking Parallel

Seventy five years after Sassfras Gully Settlement, a few quotations from recent copies of the Age.

"The Minister for Lands (Sir William McDonald) and twelve Liberal Members have chartered a plane to take them to the Little Desert for an all day tour."

.....

" It is regrettable that the Minister for Lands and Conservation (Sir William McDonald) should not heed the expert advice given to him concerning the Little Desert... insisting that his ideas are right and threatening to proceed with the allocation of the area"

.....

" In deciding to alienate the Little Desert the State Government has aligned itself with those philistines who have laid waste so much of Australia's natural beauty. The Little Desert is one of the last virgin areas of Victoria, its unique animal and plant life, if conserved could become a major tourist attraction."

.....

" The Minister for Lands (Sir William McDonald) apparently equates progress with the plough. It is a homely robust creed, borrowed from a pioneering age when nature could more than hold its own against man."

6/ 29/ 70 Report from Hansard , February 21, 1968.

Hamer and the Dandenongs.

In a Ministerial Statement "New Planning Organisations for Victoria", the Minister for Local Government, Hon. R.J. Hamer stated.....

"The eastern region contains two areas which are of the utmost importance to the metropolis, indeed to the whole State, namely the Dandenong Ranges, and the Yarra Valley, whose preservation deserves and requires the support and resources of the whole metropolitan area ."

- S A V E T H E D A N D E N O I N G S .
- S A V E T H E L I T T L E D E S E R T .
- S A V E T H E B A R R I E R R E E F .
- S A V E T H E G A R D E N S .
- S A V E O U R B E A C H

7/29/70 A Dandenoggs Trust is Needed.

Some extracts from the Save the Dandenongs leaflet.

"This memorandum assumes the general recognition of the great value of the Dandenogg Ranges to the people of Victoria and especially to those living in Melbourne, as a scenic and recreational area. It also takes as self-evident that the rapid extension, both to the base of the Mountains and amongst them, threatens the extinction of Melbourne's close mountain resort.

The main recommendations of Save the Dandenongs League (from their leaflet)

1) We strongly recommend the setting up by a special Act of a Dandenongs Trust to co-ordinate the administration of the Dandenong Ranges. It will be necessary to have the support of the public in overcoming almost inevitable opposition to such a move.

2) The Dandenongs Trust would in effect be a joint Planning Board consisting of representatives of the organisations named below, together with others named by the State Government. It would have its own revenue, technical department, and planning officer and would operate in the manner already proved successful in British areas of similar character and national importance.

The Save the Dandenongs League's leaflet gives this warning....

"Unless some action of this nature is taken without delay, it is only too certain that destruction will take place at an accelerating rate as the suburbs of Melbourne spread still further into the countryside.

"Our children and their descendants will not thank us if we do not take this last chance of preserving these hills as the essential link of Melbourne's green belt."

The original leaflet of Save the Dandenongs League was published in 1953, It was revised in 1967.

8/29/70

Two Scenic Roads instead of one Four-lane Highway.

One of the current campaigns of the Save the Dandenongs League is for a completely new highway to be built on the western side of the range. Perhaps part of the Old Beach Road from Montrose could be used as a section of this new road.

The Save the Dandenongs League claims that a new road would be a much better way of coping with the traffic problems than the present scheme of doubling the existing main road.

As you drive from Sassafras down to Ferntree Gully you cannot help but notice the destruction of some beautiful gullies by the road widening scheme which is at present in progress.

The wide bitumen strip, with few curves, now allows high powered cars to zoom through the hills in top gear.

A new road to the west would open up some magnificent views. Two scenic roads, rather than one ugly scarring four-lane highway would help to keep the Dandenongs as a retreat from the tear and rush and bustle of the modern city.

Thanks to our friends in the Hills for giving us the material for this issue.
Hats off! to those who started the campaign to "Save the Dandenongs." The first of the "Save the" groups.