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WILDLIFE RANGER

The *National Parks and Wildlife Act 1975* and its amendments provided the legislative mandate for much of the work done by QNPWS staff. Full-time Wildlife Rangers handled all wildlife matters, such as the complexity of that work.

The *Fauna Conservation Act 1976* classified fauna, including birds and some insects, according to rarity. A Section 25 Crop Damage Permit could be issued, allowing destruction of Protected Fauna, such as flying foxes, under specified circumstances. In the case of undesirable and exotic animals, most were declared as either Non Protected or Prohibited Fauna. Exceptions were water buffalo and deer, which could be kept by special permit.

My introduction to wildlife issues occurred in 1978, when two police officers called at my home in Gympie wanting to know, 'Do pelicans sleep with their heads on the water?' At Lake Alford, the area known as the 'Duck Ponds', I used my canoe to retrieve dozens of dead pelicans, black ducks, coot, eastern swamp hens and dusky moor hens, with a sprinkling of domestic ducks. Next day, twelve dead pelicans were found on the adjacent Mary River.

A neighbour confessed to shooting birds, but would not admit to using poison. Toxicology tests in Brisbane confirmed poisoning, but did not identify the particular toxin. A few years later, there was a second 'cull' of waterfowl by the same person, who was offended by native birds eating the eggs and young of domestic geese and ducks.

In 1979, when my instructions from Tom Ryan were to stay away from wildlife, I received a complaint about a zoo in the Gympie district. An emu, a red kangaroo, a grey kangaroo and a whiptail wallaby were housed together in an enclosure 12 m long by 6 m wide. Another wallaby was held in a pen measuring 2.4 m by 1 m by 0.6 m high. There were about fifty native birds in cages. I passed the information to the Wildlife Branch, but heard nothing further.

A private zoo existed on the north bank of the Noosa River opposite Noosaville. It contained many birds and a legally held koala. The owner complained bitterly whenever fireworks were used for celebrations along the river, demanding that I stop them.

On another occasion, I interviewed a man who had trapped 35 wood ducks, and another man who had cut their wings to prevent them from flying. I enquired about cages to remove the birds, but when the second man appealed to local Member Len Stephan, he was told to cut the heads off the ducks and put them in the freezer.

In 1980, a local man came to my office complaining that he had been visited by two QNPWS Wildlife Rangers, who had called to inspect his aviary. They had released many birds, but left others, and he wanted to know why. I had no knowledge of any Wildlife Rangers in my district, and when I tracked them down, they stated that the complainant had no permits for the birds released, and they did not advertise their movements in advance to any staff.

The Wildlife branch operated independently of National Parks branch, which meant that wildlife complaints could be embarrassing for National Parks staff. I was not impressed when I was asked to guide two Wildlife Rangers to a remote address north of Gympie, and was then instructed to stay behind while they drove to the house. I learned nothing from them about wildlife issues, the techniques they used, or the reasons they were there.

Sir Thomas Hiley once asked me to confirm whether the Tansey Lagoons, north of Kilkivan, were a Fauna Sanctuary. The lagoons were a declared sanctuary and all shooting was prohibited. I subsequently travelled there to inform land owners that warning-off strangers, while allowing friends to shoot protected fauna, was out of order. A year later, I was advised that shooting was continuing, so I travelled there to warn them again. Local hunters, offended at the illegal shooting, demanded an investigation into the possible pollution of the sanctuary lake bed from lead shot.

On another occasion, I was advised that a high profile local character was hunting duck out of season on the Noosa River. As the whole Noosa Shire was a sanctuary, I contacted a senior wildlife officer, asking what I should do if I happened to apprehend this person. The response was, 'In due course, we would hand his gun back with a bottle of scotch.'

These examples reflect the lack of official support I found for wildlife matters, and regional support was not to be expected either. At times, we would receive messages not to report any infringements.

At a 1985 meeting in the Maryborough office, I was made responsible for wildlife matters. Despite my lack of experience, I became an instant wildlife expert. My duties included fee collection, issuing permits to keep and move native fauna, and annual inspections of scores of licensed aviaries holding native birds. Senior staff told me to react quickly to any issues involving dangerous species, such as crocodiles, or cute and cuddly types, such as koalas. This huge commitment was now added to normal national park work.

Gerri Kluver, in the Gympie office, was keen on wildlife enforcement, and had always kept our office copy of the *Fauna Conservation Act*, with its frequent amendments, up to date. My knowledge of the legislation was sound, as I had topped the State-wide entrance exams a few years earlier. QNPWS staff working on-park tended to stay clear of wildlife matters, but interested staff were given extra training. Gerri attended a week-long law enforcement course in Brisbane, and then focussed her attention on wildlife matters.

Gerri and I were once reprimanded for a complainant's allegation that we had acted inappropriately in a wildlife interview, which we both denied. I responded that front-line staff were not getting support, and the reply was, 'The Service always supports its staff until the facts are known.' Fortunately, because I had taken the precaution of recording this incident on a pocket tape recorder, Gerri was able to transcribe the tape and type the text, which proved conclusively that the complainant was out of order.

Keeping wildlife was complex, as all native fauna had to be legally accounted for. Illegal trapping of native birds in the wild was occasionally reported. Sometimes owners would claim that particular birds, such as the rare eclectus parrot, were New Guinea natives, and therefore did not have to be registered. However, I had heard accounts of these birds being taken illegally from Iron Range in far north Queensland, so they were both native and exotic.

A register of bird numbers, including hatchings and deaths, and details of all birds moved to or from the aviary had to be maintained, together with Permits to Move. Failure to maintain records was

an offence, and abnormal numbers of births or deaths could raise a suspicion of illegality. When I did not recognise some birds, I would ask the owner to call out the names and numbers present, confirm this visually, and check the notations on the record sheet.

Most aviaries were too small for birds to fly about freely, but there were no specifications to control their conditions. Aviary inspections were not my cup of tea, and I would find myself looking at beautiful caged birds, wondering what they had done to warrant being locked up. Many of the birds came from across Australia, and some came from overseas.

Gympie police once sought my assistance at a rural property, where they had noticed some native birds. By the time I arrived, the remaining birds were two sulphur-crested cockatoos, for which no permit could be produced. It was claimed that the birds were part of a deceased estate, and there was an acrimonious dispute among family members for ownership. I resolved the argument by seizing the birds and passing them temporarily to a reputable aviculturist.

Once I had been given wildlife responsibilities, Maryborough passed more and more inspections and complaints onto me, with messages such as 'It would be nice if you could catch so-and-so' or 'Could you check out ...?' I was left to handle sensitive matters, such as confiscating an emu which was the sole pet of a wheelchair-bound man on a rural allotment. The bird collapsed and died when we tried to catch it.

Widgee and Noosa Shires had been declared sanctuaries under early legislation. However, wildlife was illegally controlled by firearms, and the use of poisons was widespread. Responding to a complaint about pale-headed rosellas eating strawberries, I found that one grower was using a Mesurol spray as a repellent, and pointed out that the withholding period for that chemical had been extended from 7 to 42 days. I lent him a noise generator from Mildura, where I had been seeking advice on problem fauna from large commercial growers. When neighbours were offended by the noise and the generator's electronics were stolen, the grower reverted to using Mesurol.

Queen Victoria's Legacy: Deer

At this time, deer were protected under our legislation – even though they aren't native to Queensland – because Queen Victoria had gifted a herd that were released in the Brisbane Valley and allowed to spread. (The Queensland Coat of Arms is supported by a brolga and a red deer.)

Numbers of legal deer farms were increasing and were subject to inspection. But illegal deer hunting was an on-going problem in the Conondale Ranges, particularly close to the 'roar' or rut, and this approximated the Easter period.

On one occasion, I was advised to stay out of the Conondales during Easter, as the Police Fauna Squad were going to carry out enforcement activities. Some time later, I called at Gallangowan Forestry station in the northern Conondale Ranges and was told that a QNPWS officer had called twice for refills of petrol during Easter. I learnt that this officer had talked about ballistics and weights of projectiles for different calibre rifles, the amount and type of powder used in muzzle loading rifles, and so on.

The mystery deepened when, some time later, I asked one of the Police Fauna Squad, 'How did you go in the Conondales during Easter?' This caused a puzzled look, followed by a denial that they had been there.

Col Bryant, an Honorary Protector near the Conondale Ranges where red deer were plentiful, often sought my involvement when he suspected something was going on. I would carry out an overnight patrol in the ranges, which required sleeping in the cabin of my vehicle in the forest.

Col's information once found us high in the ranges soon after dawn one Saturday. We came across an empty vehicle and decided to wait and watch. Another vehicle approached with four men on board. I could see a rifle case and requested it for examination. As it was empty, there was no evidence of illegal possession, so I sent them on their way. When they had departed, Col told me he had seen a rifle covered with a blanket on the floor under the feet of the men in the back of the vehicle.

On Monday morning, I had a 'please explain' from head office: 'What was I doing in the Conondale Ranges harassing a group of men?' One of the men had contacted a politician, and the demand was received at our head office. At least I had a witness!



Red deer were an issue, soon to become a major problem for society.

Reptiles

An acquaintance phoned to say she had been sent 'evidence' of a crocodile in the waterlily leaves in the Noosa River. Knowing it was important to react quickly to reports of crocodiles, I was pondering my next move, when another call came: 'I think this is a hoax. I can see pink water lillies in the photo.' My friend had hosted an overseas student, who, in appreciation, had pulled her leg. Water lillies in the Noosa River are blue!



A swamp in Cooloola.

However, I once spent several fruitless hours investigating reports of crocodiles in the wetlands south of Tewantin, and I had unsuccessfully searched mangrove-lined creeks on the western side of Fraser Island, seeking evidence of a reported crocodile. Despite this, I knew that crocodiles could be found in unusual places.

Former Noosa Shire Councillor, Olive (Macklin) Donaldson, told me that, as a child, she saw a crocodile in the surf at Little Freshwater Creek on Teewah Beach, but the adults laughed at her. Soon afterwards, local fisherman Bill Massoud found the carcass of a crocodile being devoured by dingoes on the beach further south.

Wildlife expert Steve Irwin once caught a freshwater crocodile in a dam near the Glasshouse Mountains close to the Beerwah Reptile Park (now Australia Zoo). Years later, he phoned me at Moggill, advising that he had captured a salt-water crocodile from the same dam. I measured this animal, and we agreed that he should pay royalty and legally keep it. I did not want to organise a suitable crate to transport the crocodile back to north Queensland, where they are plentiful, when Steve had gone to the trouble of setting a trap and capturing it. Crocodiles are not usually found in south Queensland, and these reptiles were probably introduced by people who brought eggs or baby crocodiles from north Queensland.

I'm not particularly fond of venomous snakes and always prefer to call on specialists to catch and release them. In January 1985, we were asked to do something about 'prolific' snakes, that were coming across the road from one of the railway national parks near Nambour. The complainant was not at home, so I called at the house next door, enquiring whether the neighbour had seen any snakes. He left me with little uncertainty about the state of mind of the complainant, then went on to say that he had personally seen three harmless green tree snakes in fifteen years.



Over-abundance of kangaroos.

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THE HUTS IN COOLOOLA

The Problem with Huts in National Parks

In 1967, I travelled from Victoria to Royal National Park, south of Sydney Harbour, for the first training course held by the newly formed New South Wales National Parks and Wildlife Service. Declared in 1879, Royal NP is the oldest national park in Australia, and the second in the world. In the southern section of the park, we were confronted by four settlements, where rows of modest shacks were occupied by cabin users, or shack users or shackies, as they were variously described.

These settlements originated after the First World War, when individuals erected shacks made from cabbage palm trunks and claimed a right as squatters on Crown Land. They stood their ground, using nothing more than cheek and bluff, and, during the depression years, they used under-privilege to challenge authorities to move them. After the Second World War, more huts were built as families grew up.

After a drowning, a life-saving club was formed. Networks developed among shack owners and social cohesiveness grew. In 1967, when the NSW NPWS advocated removal of the shacks, two politically active protection leagues were formed, and the fight was on. The Crown asserted its ownership of the shacks, but this was hotly contested by the shackies. Over following years, politicians lacked the will to enforce their own legislation and support their own department.

On the foreshore of a lovely bay, in a national park, sought-after properties were being bought and sold, but no-one held legal title to the land on which the shacks stood. While the people who arrived there first claimed rights, others were denied the opportunity. (Overlooked were the Aborigines, who had been established in the area for 7500 years.) Years of political and legal weakness had resulted in a ticking time bomb in a fire hazardous area.^[1]

The Huts on Cooloola State Forest 451

Early Forestry records suggest that huts were erected along the Cooloola beaches in the 1950s. An application by professional fishermen WG Dennington and BJ Ross in July 1959 was for an area near the lagoons at Double Island Point. More than a dozen similar requests along Teewah Beach and at Freshwater followed within twelve months. This sudden lodgement of applications may have resulted from Forestry inspections of the foreshores, when owners were told to apply for leases to formalise actions that were unlawful.

Local Forestry officers were sympathetic towards the applicants. Their Brisbane headquarters forwarded letters to the Lands Administration Commission raising no objection and listing a few desirable conditions. The forests were suffering from frequent fires emanating from Teewah Beach, and Forestry wanted adequate controls imposed.

However, Forestry officers were totally unprepared for the controversial issue of sand mining. With the availability of 4WD vehicles, and the ease of crossing the Noosa River by mining barge or ferry, public attention was being focused on Cooloola.

The original Dennington and Ross hut appears to have been close to the existing amenity block at Double Island Point. In 1960, these men made an unsuccessful application for a 130 hectare lease covering a strip across the isthmus. This would enable them to use level areas near the lagoons for up to six motel type buildings, and they promised that public access along the Leisha Track from either beach would be maintained, provided it was not abused.

Most of the applicants for beach huts lived at Tewantin, with one each from Kenilworth, Imbil and Kilkivan. The majority were located at Ross's Camp, as Little Freshwater was then known. According to Forestry files, Ross's Camp was named after the person who first opened access from the beach to the level area behind the frontal dunes. Olive Donaldson told me Ross's Camp was named after her father, William John Ross. She described substantial huts, built from sawn driftwood collected along the beach.



Huts at Little Freshwater, c1975 (photo Queensland Government).

Agitation by hut owners for a Camping and Recreation Reserve at Ross's Camp stalled when the Widgee Shire Clerk considered that Council would not be interested in becoming Trustees.

George Clifford sought a lease for his first hut just south of King's Bore. When instructed to leave, he claimed that, as a former mining company employee, he had the right to erect another hut on current mining leases at Little Freshwater, even though the company had ceased operations. After the Mines Department rejected this claim, Clifford wrote to the Premier, stating that, while waiting to be re-employed when mining operations re-commenced, he was earning a living collecting cuttlefish bone for a firm in Sydney. He argued that the Australian Constitution forbids a State government from interfering with the rights of an individual to trade interstate. Action by Forestry lapsed because the second hut was on a mining lease.

In 1961, Forestry instructed twenty-two applicants to remove their structures from State Forest 451. Hut owners made representations to Max Hodges, the Member for Gympie, and Otto Madsen, the Minister for Agriculture and Forestry, and short term extensions were offered. Once politicians became involved, District Forester Reg Doggrell's attempts to control the coastal areas were not supported by his own department. Confusion reigned, with local Foresters endeavouring to see huts removed, while their head office was granting extensions to some owners.

The bureaucratic processes ground on, with endless correspondence between applicants, Forestry and the Land Administration Commission, who were reluctant to see beach leases issued because they were about to release land for sale at Teewah Village. When 24 surveyed allotments were auctioned on 12 July 1961, many were bought by hut owners, including George Clifford.

In 1972, Reg Doggrell wrote that, where beach traffic in the 1930s averaged one vehicle per week, there were now traffic hazards most weekends. He disliked 'beachcombers', whose 'main interest is taking anything that can be turned to short-term profit', and squatters, whose buildings

were unlawful. His other concerns were fires and shooting, and taking commercial quantities of coloured sands and flints and stones from Aboriginal middens.

He expressed frustration at the token enforcement along the beach and the Department's unrealistic attitude towards control. He summed up the unfolding saga of the huts with a degree of prescience:

Locating of squatters is proceeding but lagging behind the increase in numbers of huts built ... at one stage I favoured no real pressure on these squatters until the proposed national park was a reality ... squatters and their associated pollution may be listed as one of the features of the beach area by that date.

The Huts In Cooloolola National Park

In 1975, there were at least 61 structures within the newly created national park for which no permits could be found. More shacks were built as local people capitalised on Forestry's lack of enforcement. It was a case of stand your ground and use bluff and obfuscation. Some hut owners would argue vehemently that they had ancient squatter's rights, because the huts were established before the national park came into being.

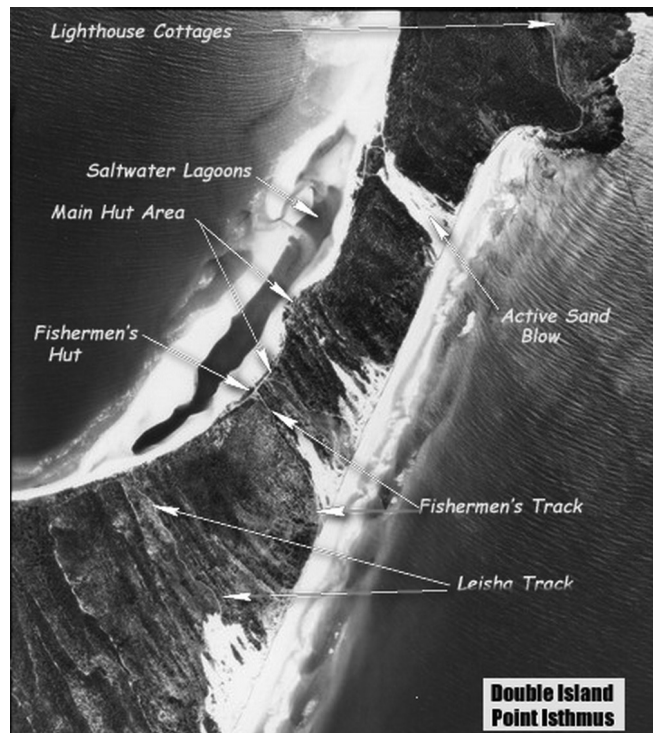
Many people staked a claim on what they viewed as 'vacant' Crown land but Cooloolola was regarded by law as 'occupied' Crown land. It had not been 'vacant' since 1880, when it was declared a Timber Reserve. It continued to be 'occupied' in 1925, when the tenure was converted to State Forest, and again as Cooloolola National Park in 1975. The Double Island Point headland had been surveyed as Lighthouse Reserve in 1919.

The efforts of QNPWS to remove all huts were not greeted with approval. Thirty years on, I was referred to by one Gympie-ite with a long memory as 'That bastard who pulled our hut down'.

In 1975, Chuck Wilder, who had worked for the NSW NPWS, and knew the Royal National Park hut problems intimately, treated the presence of the structures in Cooloolola with concern. In April 1976, orders were served on people present at the huts.

Widgee Shire Council then wrote to Forestry and QNPWS, stating that Council considered 'the Government's action in forcing removal of fishing huts etc. from Double Island Point ... was most unreasonable, as many of these people had been visiting this area for a great number of years and have suddenly found themselves with no-where to camp.'

QNPWS staff from Brisbane continued to visit Cooloolola in an attempt to locate the owners of these structures. I use the term 'structures' deliberately, for they ranged from a few reasonably well-built and tidy huts to caravans without wheels, to huts which had collapsed or could not be used

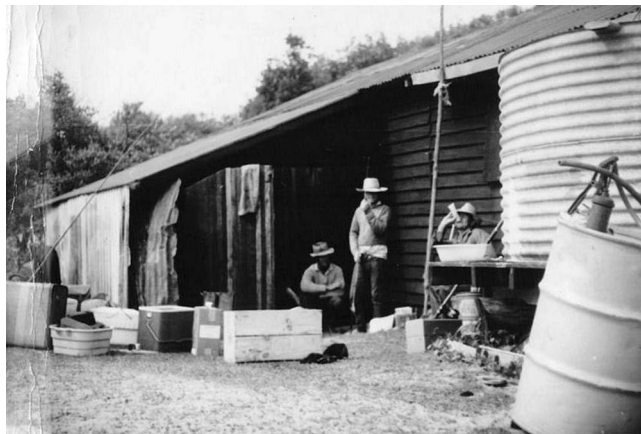


Aerial view of Double Island Point.

for shelter and were best described as 'junk'. Each hut and caravan was photographed and given a number.

Some years later I was informed that many of the abandoned huts were built by sand mining company employees as shelters for their weekend fishing. As mining drew to a close, they simply walked away. Many of these huts contained dirty mattresses or old kerosene refrigerators. My highest estimate of value of contents in one hut was \$10, and the cost of removal was greater than the value of the building materials.

In 1977, professional fisherman Sonny Chaplin, representing other hut owners, met with Chuck Wilder. Sonny sought accommodation for nine or ten people for three to four months annually, security to store equipment, petrol, nets and personal belongings, and the right to continuously run a 10hp diesel generator to operate a refrigeration unit. He was advised that no further action would be taken in relation to his hut until the local Magistrate had issued official orders, and for a period of three months after that.



Fishermen's hut at Double Island Point (photo S. Chaplin).

Sonny sought political assistance, and, as a result, Gordon Simpson, Member for Cooroora, representing some hut owners, brought Kevin Tomkins, Minister for Lands, Forestry, National Parks and Wildlife Service, to visit the area. Others in attendance were a police officer, a member of the State Emergency Service, and a Volunteer Coast Guard.

Mr Simpson recognised that many of the huts were eyesores, but stated that members of the public and professional fishermen needed shelter. He wrote to our Minister to recommend the setting aside of a six acre plot for public use at 'King's Bore', with tenders called and the successful person expected to supply water, sewerage and power. The Coast Guard sought a half-acre site on the northern side of Double Island Point for radio broadcasting and to launch rescue boats. No action was taken in relation to these suggestions.

Sonny Chaplin objected to the Order to remove his hut, and wrote to the Premier, saying that he and up to five other families received 80% of their living from the beach, and at times there would be \$30,000 worth of equipment there. Since the issue of the precise location of his hut was important, he stated it was 'about on high water mark', but two months later he wrote that the last 8'6" (2.59 metre) high tide had gone under it. He wrote to the Prime Minister, saying the hut was just inside the national park, but Forestry had no previous objections to it being there. In 1978 the Director of the Queensland Fisheries Service wrote to QNPWS recommending a stay of removal for six years – Sonny Chaplin's estimated time for the fishing industry in the area to become non-viable.

Our Minister, Tom Newbery, wrote to the Premier in relation to Sonny Chaplin's letter to the Prime Minister, pointing out that there was no provision under existing legislation to allow a commercial operation in a national park. He wrote that there was '... no alternative to the removal by Mr Chaplin of structures associated with his operation at such time as Court orders are issued against all illegal occupants of the park.'

On my arrival in Gympie, Sonny Chaplin informed me that no one person owned the hut known as the Fishermen's Hut, or Red Hut. He said the hut, formerly owned by Donny Clark, was now of a loose, consensual, collective ownership, and he nominated himself as the owner for the building.

In June 1978, I accompanied Tom Ryan to the Gympie Court House, where the Magistrate adjourned our applications for a month because we had not issued a formal Summons. The frustration of QNPWS was summed up by Syd Curtis, who noted on the paper work, 'How long, O Lord, how long?'

Reassessing the situation, we placed the huts into two categories: first, 'where an owner or occupier could be located', and second, 'where no owner could be found'. A further issue related to the definition of 'hut', as the law stipulated that a caravan was not a hut, even when wheels were removed and it was roofed.

Returning to the Court, four QNPWS officers gave evidence. In some cases, officers had spoken to people occupying a structure, who either denied owning it or knowing the owner. In other instances, residents at some addresses given by hut occupants denied any knowledge of the hut. The Magistrate ruled that the 'unknown owner' structures were to be removed within four weeks. However, he maintained that QNPWS should have issued Summons to 'known owners', and said he would put his ruling in writing.

Sonny Chaplin told the Court that a peg set in the ground by Forestry marked the high water mark on the edge of the park. He said this peg was behind his hut and therefore his hut was outside the jurisdiction of QNPWS. Despite previous correspondence, Mr Chaplin was allowed further time to prepare his case.^[2]

In October, QNPWS asked for a Supreme Court ruling to determine whether we were following correct procedure in issuing Orders and not a formal Summons. The Court found in our favour, and we requested a fresh date for another hearing in the Magistrate's Court.

Specialist advice about the national park boundary came from Senior Draftsman Des Collins. His initial advice was that the term High Water Mark is taken by National Mapping as the HWM at the time Cooloola National Park was gazetted in December 1975. A common law interpretation of High Water Mark was that it was a mean of all high water tides. During 1978, the average of the monthly tide heights was 2.01 metres. I determined the Mean High Water Mark by measuring from the high tide mark during eight September inspections and determined that the nearest point of Sonny Chaplin's hut was 35 metres above the MHW. M.



Fishermen's hut at Double Island Point
(photo Queensland Government).



Professional fishermen at Double Island Point
(photo S. Chaplin).

In July, I presented this evidence to the Court. Despite correspondence between Sonny Chaplin and QNPWS spanning three years, the Magistrate over-ruled the protests of our prosecutor and allowed Sonny more time to consider his position. The Magistrate eventually issued a Court Order, giving notice that, if the hut was still there on 14 December, we could remove it.

I then flew to Orchid Beach on Fraser Island and travelled with Overseer Ron Walk to the fishermen's camp near Sandy Cape. There was a distinct air of hostility among the fishermen. Even their dogs were hostile and barely restrained. Seeking Sonny Chaplin, I handed him the Order to remove his hut from Double Island Point. To his credit, he complied.

Years later, I met a Crown Law solicitor who was surprised and interested to meet 'Ron Turner'. He said that, when studying law in relation to the removal of illegal structures on Crown Land, the model *pro forma* to use was based on the 'Complaint of Ron Turner, QNPWS officer ...'

Ironically, during the winter of 1981, as the saga of the illegal huts drew to a close, there was a massive change in ocean currents on the northern side of Double Island Point. The outer barrier of the salt water lagoon was swept away and the sea eroded steadily inland. The casuarina I had used as a datum tree in front of Sonny Chaplin's hut disappeared, along with many other trees and QNPWS signs. The beach and freshwater lagoons in front of the camping zone disappeared.

The toe of Death Adder Hill was originally 30 metres behind Chaplin's hut. The ocean undermined the base of this dune between the Leisha and Fishermen's tracks, causing a massive land slip. In a short space of time, the ocean ate inland 65 metres from the MHW, washing away the site of the fishermen's huts.

I felt a sense of deflation! I had derived no joy from removing the huts. All the confrontation, personal unpleasantness, involvement of politicians, court appearances and lawyers came to nothing. Nature had swept the lot into the ocean! Some day, however, that elusive 'Mean High Water Mark' might need to be recalculated by others.

A photo taken by John Brown (see first photo on page 93), a visitor to Double Island Point in the 1950s, shows a sparse vegetative cover on Death Adder Hill, indicating that it had previously been undermined, perhaps fifty years or more earlier.

The Apex Club

Despite the Orders posted on each hut over a period of years, three Gympie men came into my office in July 1982 with a local surveyor, claiming a hut near King's Bore was not on the national park. I was aware of reports that an Apex Club had renovated one hut and locked it again. Local staff knew the structure as Quatie's hut^[3] or the Apex Club hut, although the Apexians claimed it wasn't theirs.

I advised the Apexians that, as no person had claimed ownership during Court proceedings, or contacted me, QNPWS had been authorised to remove it. I tabled the gazettal map of Cooloola National Park, showing the mining leases along Teewah Beach and our common boundary with those leases. I produced the survey data our surveyors had completed using a theodolite, and pointed out where some original mining pegs had been located. One of these pegs was not too far from the hut. There was no doubt that the hut was located on the national park and to state otherwise was nonsense. The surveyor accepted my evidence. The Apexians, however, felt their argument still had some merit, but asked to be given five weekends to dismantle the hut and clean up the area.

They next appealed to Gympie Mayor, Mick Venardos, who raised the matter with the Member for Gympie, Len Stephan. Len had no personal knowledge of the hut and accepted my invitation

to inspect it. That Saturday was wet, and inside the hut the atmosphere was dismal. The leaking roof was dripping onto a wet carpet on the floor. A huge heap of cans and bottles and old building material had been dumped into a hollow a few metres away. I was able to show Len one of the mining lease pegs, which was the national park boundary. This visit must have been a success, for I heard no more from him about the matter.

The saga of the huts was almost over. To my embarrassment, the pressure of other work meant we did not have the staff or the equipment to remove this remaining structure, and professional fishermen started to use it.

I was desperate to end the hut saga. In August 1982, Tom Ryan sent a 6WD truck and 4WD tractor from Fraser Island, and 20 Honorary Protectors came to Teewah Beach to assist me. Holes were dug at the rear of the camping area at Freshwater. Quatie's hut was demolished, loaded onto the truck and taken to Freshwater for burial. The pile of cans and bottles was too large to remove and was covered with sand, creating a bonanza for some future archaeologist. This modern midden appeared to have special significance for some Apexians, who suggested to me, years later, that QNPWS should erect a monument to mark their efforts.

In July 1983 I met a deputation of five professional fishermen at Freshwater. When all were settled with a cup of tea, I listened to their demands:

1. The government should pay them \$300 per person per week to leave the area.
2. A camping area should be set aside for professional fishermen.
3. The Bribie Island beach was only open to local residents and professional fishermen. Cooloola should be the same.
4. They should be allowed to stay for more than 28 days, and have the special privilege of using any camp ground when it was officially full.

The Huts at Little Freshwater

In February 1978, QNPWS wrote to Widgee Shire Council, seeking advice about the status of the two huts on the council controlled Recreation Reserve 1101, situated at Little Freshwater Creek. We asked the Council to confirm ownership, and perhaps erect signs to indicate that the reserve was not part of the national park.

Knowing the location of original pegs was an advantage in determining precisely where Mining Leases 571 and 574 jutted inland. These had been granted in 1956 prior to declaration of the 1.2 ha reserve in 1964. Cudgen RZ stated that the huts were not their property, doubting they were on their leases. Confusion arose when it was realised the reserve had been gazetted on the mining leases and a variation of the deception encountered in dealing with other huts developed.

Widgee Shire Council had approached QNPWS in 1978 seeking the names and addresses of the owners of the huts on the Council Recreation Reserve, so they could take appropriate action to remove them. In 1982 Councillors inspected Double Island Point, Freshwater, and Recreation Reserve 1101 with me. I explained that the presence of their Recreation Reserve and the huts at Little Freshwater inhibited our development of a modest camping area here, and Council would find it impractical to develop and maintain such a tiny area.

Forestry officers located two owners of one hut, who sought permission to have the hut left for the coming summer season, agreeing to remove it by 30 January 1983. One of the owners advised that he had relinquished his interest in the hut to the other owner. This owner made representations to the

Minister for Lands, Forestry and Police, who granted a three year extension on the 1983 agreement. This move did not impress local Forestry officers, who had not been consulted, and the matter dragged on for years with the recalcitrant Widgee Shire Council.

The issue of the huts and the continued presence of Recreation Reserve 1101 was related to the antipathy of Widgee Shire Council towards QNPWS at that time. The hut owners have continued to enjoy exclusive use of this area. They have even erected a 'No Unauthorized Entry' sign on a gate, prohibiting access to what is a public reserve.

Page's Hut

Page's hut on the Commonwealth Lighthouse Reserve was an issue with many hut owners, who demanded to know why it had such protected status. It was built by Bob and George Page, businessmen of Pomona, who had been carrying out maintenance work on the houses at the Double Island Point lightstation for many years. Arising out of this work was approval from the lighthouse keeper for them to build a boatshed on the isthmus near the Big Blow. This structure was eventually overwhelmed by drifting sand.

In 1947, they built the second of their cottages on the headland. Later, a lease was issued and the cottage was rebuilt, enlarged and improved. When QNPWS assumed control of the headland, they stipulated that the lease was issued to the original Page brothers for their lifetimes, and was not to be passed on to descendants. The lease was terminated in 2012.

The Oyster Lease Camp

I was unaware of another incursion onto Cooloolo National Park until December 1979, when a fire was reported on the peninsula west of the Carlo launching ramp. Overseer Bob Schultz and I loaded my Canadian canoe with knapsacks, rakhoes, axes and life jackets, and paddled across to the point, where we found a fire burning quietly through the vegetation. More importantly, there were two caravans, a shed, a toilet, miscellaneous equipment and domestic rubbish, all associated with a commercial oyster operation. The camp was guarded by a dog and a cat and 'Keep off, trespassers will be prosecuted' signs had been erected on the national park.

I located the owner at Tin Can Bay. He had sought a 2.4 ha. lease over the waters of the inlet for an oyster farm, and readily admitted he knew the land area was national park and thought he would carry out a little protective burning. I returned to post an official Order to move onto the caravans. The matter was tested further in the Gympie Magistrates Court in April 1980 and the camp was removed.

Soon afterwards I said farewell to Bob Schultz with my best wishes for his future at Lamington National Park. I was really sorry to see him go. He was ex-Navy, friendly, competent and always tidy with a well-trimmed beard. In fact, he was almost embarrassingly tidy, with an ability to look professional in all circumstances.

The Forestry Caravan

A slow drive easterly from Coops Corner on the Cooloolo Way reveals a pleasing change in landscape, with heathlands and scattered bush, and the Cooloolo Sandpatch as a dramatic backdrop. Coasting down the track one evening in 1980 to listen for ground parrots, I was stunned to see, in the dusk, what appeared to be a box-type caravan on the interface between heath and bushland near Teewah Creek Bridge, where camping was occasionally occurring. I couldn't believe it; not another hut!

Enquiries revealed that a Forestry scientist had been working in Rainbow Beach and Tin Can Bay, carrying out research into rainbow lorikeets. Massive numbers of these birds were roosting in both townships. The unannounced arrival of this caravan was a surprise, and the matter was taken up inter-departmentally. However, the results of his research were important for me years later, when I advised orchardists that these lorikeets could travel 45kms from roosting to feeding areas, and return daily.

Double Island Point Isthmus – After the Huts

Severe erosion caused by uncontrolled vehicular usage across four tracks and exacerbated by strong south-easterly winds was threatening Double Island Point. QNPWS was also alarmed that cyclonic weather and storm surges could cause the ocean to break through the isthmus.

Both the Beach Protection Authority and soil scientist Cliff Thompson cited Mudjimba Island off Alexandra Headland as an example of the ocean breaking through an isthmus. This island may formerly have been a headland connected to the mainland by sand dunes, which had eroded away. The coastline had retreated to form the present beach, leaving rocky Mudjimba as an island.

According to professional fisherman Sonny Chaplin, the Leisha Track had been established by Wally Owen, Noel Poole and Digger Thomas, and was named after the 22 metre Motor Vessel *Leisha*, wrecked in 1954. The Fishermen's Track was dug by three Markwell brothers – Denny, Vivian and Carl – and three Boyds – Fred, Charlie and Bluey – to facilitate access for a GMC truck carrying a refrigeration unit to the Fishermen's Hut. Persistent on-shore winds caused a build-up of deep, soft sand on the eastern end. Traversing this track was difficult at the best of times. Sonny and other fishermen cut casuarinas and used them to corduroy the track.

Sonny also recalled a Swamp Track, which by 1978 had been abandoned and was reverting to nature. This track traversed some peaty soil, which was often wet and boggy, and was blocked by an accumulation of wind-blown sand at the eastern end. It had been opened by George Clifford, in response to complaints from professional fishermen that his 2WD tourist truck, equipped with wide tyres, was damaging the corduroy along the Fishermen's Track.

A mobile sand blow, known as the Big Blow, lay just south of the Double Island Point headland.



Big Blow at Double Island point, looking north west (photo Queensland Government).



Big Blow at Double Island Point looking south east (photo Queensland Government).

An early user of this crossing point was Bill Massoud of Tewantin, who used planks laid on the sand to assist his vehicle. In 1978, there were five off-road 'challenge tracks' leading into this dune from Teewah Beach. They were used by various registered and unregistered recreation vehicles, professional fishermen and sand miners. Some vehicles made it across the isthmus when the sand was wet, but sensible drivers did not even try when it was dry.

Articles printed in various outdoors magazines revealed how drivers of 4WD vehicles were using the raw sand dunes at the Big Blow and the wrecked *Cherry Venture* to test the performance of different types of tyres in soft sand. Cans and bottles on the sand ridges indicated where a 'cheer squad' had sat to applaud the attempts of friends to drive up the steeper dunes.

In 1974, Cudgen RZ sought approval to cart mineral concentrate in 4WD trucks across this sand blow. Their usage, which would last for 100 days, was stipulated to be eight trucks per day assisted by crawler tractors. Widgee Shire Council requested that a track be constructed across the Big Blow at Forestry expense, as Council had no funds available. No action was taken.

The Secretary of the Association of 4WD Clubs pleaded twice with me to abandon the prosecution of what she described as the 'normally responsible' 4WD club members. This arose from an incident on Teewah Beach, when 4WD vehicles were repeatedly driven across the beach spinifex grass to climb the frontal dunes in the national park, an action that readily destroys the grass. The matter was successfully resolved at the Gympie Court.

I was told that, when attempts were being made to salvage the stranded *Cherry Venture*, an application had been made to QNPWS to dredge a channel across the isthmus and refloat the ship in the saltwater lagoon. This was refused!

Engineer Rex Faine of the Cooloola Committee and I inspected the three vehicular routes crossing the isthmus. The only viable route was the Leisha Track, which was generally wide enough for two vehicles. This would cost \$65,000 to harden with timber.

Vehicles attempting to tow trailers across the isthmus in dry conditions tended to be bad news for other drivers. Tempers flared when vehicles became bogged in deep sand, or when radiators boiled. Park staff avoided the area as much as they could due to abuse from frustrated visitors.

In 1983, knowing where the ocean boundaries were, local staff installed bollards and logs to block access across the Big Blow. She-oak trees and beach spinifex grass were also planted. This blockage was generally respected by visitors. Finance was eventually provided, and, in 1984-85, District Ranger Johnston hardened the Leisha Track with pallets of boards. The Fishermen's track was then closed.

The Hang Gliding Club

In 1984 I met a member of a hang-gliding club, and discussed a new gliding site that had appeared at Double Island Point. He claimed it had been built by the Widgee Shire Council and no, he hadn't discussed the site with the club's safety officer. He expressed disgust at how members of the public were using the ramp to climb up from the beach. He said the site had been fertilised and trees were to be planted.

Widgee Shire Chairman Adrian McClintock advised me that Councillors were not aware that the site was in the park. Hang gliding had been raised by Cr Ned Kelly, who received approval to proceed with its development if he had sufficient funds in his local budget. Apparently such details as the tenure of the land were of no concern to him. The hang gliding enthusiasts lost interest in

the site, perhaps because of the maintenance required, and soon abandoned it. Park staff were left to clear away the timber steps and broken, rusty wire. The residual, expanding scar up the dune face still encourages visitors to climb.



Former hang gliding site Double Island Point, 2014.

Endnotes

- ¹ An analysis of the 200 cabins in Royal National Park can be found in 'Royal National Park coastal cabin areas – conservation management plan'. <https://www.environment.nsw.gov.au/-/media/OEH/Corporate-Site/Documents/Parks-reserves-and-protected-areas/Conservation-management-plans/royal-national-park-coastal-cabins-conservation-management-plan-050685.pdf>
- ² The proceedings were reported in *The Gympie Times*, 15 July 1978.
- ³ Arthur Edward Quatermass operated a footwear business in Mary Street, Gympie. 'AE', as he was known, assumed ownership of a hut for the value of an electric frypan, and the building became known as Quatie's hut. Up to 30 people at a time would use this and Whythey's hut nearby. Members of the Gympie Apex Club made extensive use of the area, with one member controlling numbers by bookings.

12

CAMPING MANAGEMENT AND BOUNDARIES

Cooloola NP

There were many issues in other national parks in our region, but, for me, it was always back to Cooloola with its multitude of problems. There were no guidelines to follow; I was breaking new ground. National park management was not an exact science, and conservation was not widely accepted in the Gympie district. When the Draft Management Plan for Cooloola National Park was published, it dealt with broad concepts, not site-specific management issues.

There were many urgent problems, which I discussed with Tom Ryan and, at times, Chuck Wilder. The small community at Rainbow Beach was heavily tourist oriented, and many of their problems were blamed on the national park, particularly when we sought to control and limit camping numbers. Our focus was on Freshwater and the camping zone at Double Island Point.

Staff issued free camping permits at Cooloola after camps had been erected, which was a necessary but pointless exercise. There was never a total issue of permits from which to glean accurate statistics, but most camping visitors came from the Brisbane-Ipswich area. Visitors who found Freshwater too crowded merely moved onto the beach and continued to use our facilities. Catering for the public came first, and we were forced to clean toilets, pump water and remove dogs as required. Litter collection and rubbish removal to distant Rainbow Beach involved a two hour turn-around. Unregulated camping was occurring in other places, such as Poverty Point and Teewah Bridge.

During Easter 1979, severe overcrowding had occurred around the foreshore at Double Island Point. At this time, water supplies were unable to cope with demand, despite the installation of a tank filled by a small petrol motor and a windmill.



Camping occurred randomly along the length of Teewah Beach (photo B. Thomas).



850 camps were established around the foreshore in 1979 (photo J. Brown, 1958).

Reporting at length on camping issues on the coast, *The Gympie Times* of 15 December 1979 said that the Rainbow Beach Tourist and Development Association had been urging Council to establish another camping ground at Rainbow Beach since 1975. According to Widgee Shire Council Chairman, Adrian McClintock, land was being made available by the mining company adjacent to its dry mill site at Rainbow Beach, but this would not be available for 18 months.

I was quoted outlining the enormity of our out-of-control camping problem within the national park:

Health regulations stipulate that a maximum of 80 camps can use each of our toilet blocks. There were 850 camps at Double Island Point last Easter for one toilet block and 430 camps at Freshwater to two toilet blocks. There were a further 150 camps along Teewah Beach, many of which used our facilities. In the near future usage has to be curtailed and we must impose controls. The regional question is still "Where do they go?"

Local viewpoints were expressed:

Residents and campers alike complained about gross overcrowding at Rainbow Beach and Inskip Point last Christmas. The lack of sanitary arrangements at Inskip Point was also a matter of concern. It was like a foul smelling pig sty ... Is Rainbow Beach going to look like an outsize gypsy encampment again this year'?

With QNPWS support and the assistance of Gerri Kluver, I publicised a new approach: 'Get



Camping occurred adjacent to the former freshwater lagoon (photo Queensland Government).

a permit before camping, numbers will be limited.’ In March 1980, I travelled to the television studio at Maryborough to be interviewed on this matter. My message was that we would cut the number of camps at Double Island Point and Freshwater, in accord with health regulations. During Easter Friday 1980, I was on duty all night in both areas, in an effort to control the number of people and dogs.

Public reaction was swift and condemnatory, particularly within the Rainbow Beach business community. *The Gympie Times* of 1 April 1980 denounced QNPWS and mentioned that Freshwater camping had been cut to 700, about half of last year’s numbers. The next day, 4GY’s early morning radio announcer, Brian Taylor – who was distinctly anti-national park – thundered that he was going to raise the matter of reduced camping with the Shire Chairman. The thrust of his regular morning chat was to make outrageous statements and sign off with, ‘Anyway, that’s what I think.’ However, QNPWS had broken the ice. We reviewed the operation, recognised what we could have done better, and started to plan for the next holiday season.

Some Rainbow Beach business people blamed national parks for any poor tourist season! If ... If ... If only there were better roads and facilities and larger camping areas, more people would come, despite the inclement weather! When airline pilots went on strike, the down-turn in Rainbow Beach tourism wouldn’t have been so bad if national parks allowed more visitors! These people were oblivious to the facts that their tourist industry was built on sand, metaphorically as well as literally, and heavily dependent on weather.

As part of a strategy to control numbers, the press were invited to inspect the amenities and camping areas. I informed them of Council’s health limits to camping, based on numbers of people per toilet cubicle. The ball was rolling again! Our efforts were not completely successful that summer. We did not have the staff to stop visitors erecting tents along the beach and using our facilities.

At Christmas 1980, the toilets at Freshwater and Double Island Point blocked, and both septic tanks overflowed. I purchased some Reln piping and we extended absorption trenches. Not long afterwards, I purchased a sludge pump and sucked the contents of the septic tanks into an old trailer-tanker donated by Forestry.

It wasn’t hard to enlist staff support to control camping numbers. At Double Island Point, we erected large signs delineating the area available for camping, and smaller signs stating the area was a national park. Working as a volunteer, I stayed mobile during the holidays, assisting with rubbish collection and toilet-cleaning. We cut the numbers of people using our camp grounds and eliminated dogs, but again saw the need to control camping along the beach near Freshwater.

QNPWS had previously suggested a major camping area at Rainbow Beach to offset proposed limits in Cooloola NP, but had been told by Council to restrict its comments to the areas it controlled. Fragile Inskip Point was widely used for uncontrolled camping and did not enjoy a good reputation until 1996, when it was placed under re-named QPWS control as the Inskip Point Recreation Area.

Criticism from many quarters was unrelenting. My frustration caused me to write directly to Widgee Shire Council, challenging them to advise me where we could put more camps, erect more toilets to comply with health regulations, and obtain fresh water. I explained that test bores at the base of the dunes had uncovered buried rubbish and foul water. Also, the unstable sand adjacent to the headland was subject to tidal influences and storms. I received no censure internally for my actions; perhaps I had merely echoed the thoughts of many senior staff. The Council did not respond.

At Double Island Point during 1981-82, the sea started to wash away, firstly the outer bar forming the salt-water lagoon, then the beach sand protecting the freshwater lagoon. Both lagoons and the camp grounds disappeared.

We considered other areas for camping. The old Telegraph Track held some potential, but it was in a narrow valley, only accessible with a steep climb. The area would not warrant an amenities block and fresh water was not available.

At my invitation, the Widgee Shire Health Inspector, Brian Jensen, visited camping areas in Cooloola. He advised us on improving water reticulation and assisted with invaluable water testing. He was a person I liked and respected, and his quiet support behind the scenes helped modify Council's aggressive attitude towards QNPWS over camping issues.



Sand bars reform and coastal erosion is healing.

After Councillors inspected the beach areas at Double Island Point, Freshwater and Little Freshwater in January 1982, they realised the restricted size of usable areas in the national park, and the issue of camping numbers slowly faded, much to the chagrin of some local business people.

In 1982, I introduced a system whereby the public could obtain permits in advance. The telephone ran hot, with 50 to 75 calls a day. When international travel writer Leigh Hemmings interviewed me in March 1982, I said:

Last Christmas [at Double Island Point] we were getting 350 to 450 camps at a time. The toilets obviously couldn't cope and were shut for two and a half days. Large signs had been erected at either end of the camping zone stating 'Permit Required Before Camping', which had reduced the area available for camping.

Last week we conducted a ballot for campsites at Double Island Point, Freshwater and the Noosa River. The operation was successful, and we kept a record of all incoming telephone calls. Not one person was critical, and the general thrust of comments was that it was a long time overdue. No one was denied a permit.

By 1983 the concept of getting a permit in advance was generally accepted and rarely disputed, but there were extraordinary problems along Teewah Beach. In the early years increasing numbers of untidy campers were staying for longer periods and many left fires and bags of rubbish, encouraging feral dogs. I had neither the staff, vehicles nor time to continually clean up Teewah Beach and fight escaped fires.

Camping along Teewah Beach became contentious when visitors stood their ground, claiming they were camping on mining leases. 'Mac', a frequent camper, would not refuse my request to move his camp, but stonewalled, insisting that I draw a line in the sand to demonstrate exactly where the national park or fauna reserve boundary was. If I would do that, he said, he would move his camp onto adjacent mining leases. Soon afterwards, he staked a 'land claim' on a section of Inskip Point, on behalf of his 'Macca Tribe'.

Legal boundaries between State Forest, national park and multiple mining leases could not be readily determined along Teewah Beach. The government's original intention had been to define the national park's eastern boundary along the high water mark, but mining leases had previously been issued along the beach. To avoid delay in gazetting the park, our boundary was drawn to abut the western edge of the mining leases. These leases then became a treeless part of State Forest 451.

The presence of Fauna Reserve 1093 added further complications. The Reserve's eastern boundary, the high water mark, was overlapped by mining leases. Entry into this reserve required a permit, with a \$300 penalty for trespass, making beach camping there illegal.

Complicating matters further, Widgee Shire Council insisted that QNPWS facilitate camping along the northern section of Teewah Beach while on the southern section, Noosa Shire Council steadfastly maintained a no beach-camping approach. However this Council did develop a camp ground adjacent to the beach south of Teewah Village.

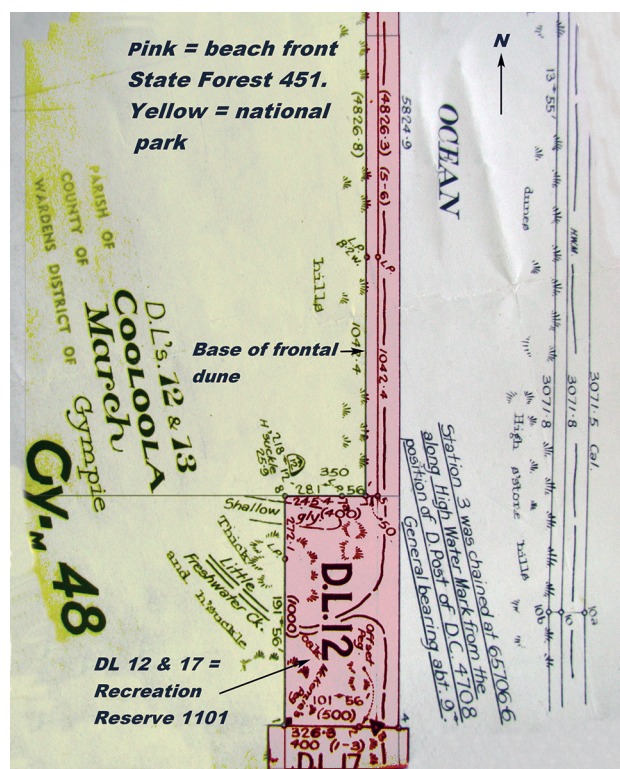
In an effort to resolve the boundary issues, Chuck Wilder employed Ian Hoey and Sandy McCutcheon to carry out a theodolite survey of Teewah Beach. They located a few original mining survey pegs, which showed that the national park boundary abutted the mining lease boundary at the toe of the steep dunes. The mining leases extended towards the ocean from 30 to 40 metres, and for 50 kilometres north to Double Island Point. Steel pegs, which we set deeply in concrete, were used to re-define the boundary, but some visitors saw what we were doing and used their 4WD vehicles to winch them out.

In 1984, I set out to manage out-of-control camping in Cooloola National Park and State Forest 451 along Teewah Beach. As part of my plan, I attended a meeting in Maryborough with Kevin Bade and Overseers Mark Johnston and Mark Planck to determine strategy. These overseers were former Forestry employees who still ha-

We decided to contact each of the camps along Teewah Beach during Easter Saturday 1984 with a simple message: ‘Do you have a permit to camp? If not, enjoy your weekend but don’t come back without a permit obtained in advance.’ It was to be a courteous message, with no-one asked to move.

Without Forest Officer status, I could not enforce camping issues on State Forest, but I could enforce the *Fauna Act* along the Fauna Reserve beach, which co-incided with part of the Noosa Shire no-camping area. Doug Reinke, the Freshwater Overseer, was to handle the beach closest to Freshwater, and could get support by radio if necessary. At one beach camp, he received a dog bite.

I outlined my proposals to Forestry personnel at Toolara. Although supportive, they could not spare staff or vehicles to assist, but on 13 April 1984, *The Gympie Times* reported that Forestry



Teewah Beach dredging leases at Little Freshwater Creek.

Minister Bill Glasson had withdrawn all camping permits along the State Forest section of Teewah Beach, due to visitors leaving rubbish and unattended fires.

QNPWS had issued a full complement of permits for our camp grounds, and staff, including myself, had spoken politely to visitors at 370 camps along the beach front. No-one held a permit, but no-one was told to move, although dog owners were asked to remove their pets. Campers were asked to remove their rubbish and ensure that fires were extinguished. I should have taken notice of the date of the Minister's Friday 13 press release. Gordon Simpson, Member for Cooroora, complained to Head Office with allegations of harassment, and by Wednesday I was in big trouble.

On 23 April, ten days after the press release, frequent camper 'Mac', who had often asked me to prove the national park, fauna reserve or mining lease boundaries, asserted in the *Sunshine Coast Daily* that he would have to be dragged away from his beach in handcuffs by police and a lock-up van. The newspaper also reported, quite inaccurately, that 1000 people had been told to leave.

I had noticed Gordon Simpson talking to some campers along the beach on his way to spend the weekend at Page's Hut on the Lighthouse Reserve. In a statement, also published in *The Courier Mail* on 26 April, he supported beach camping, saying it was ridiculous that campers should be asked to move because it was one of the last places where families could have a cheap holiday, and they were not doing any harm.

During this storm of unfair criticism, I was left without Departmental support from Maryborough or Moggill, and I became a scapegoat. Senior QNPWS officers refused to accept any responsibility, and local Forestry officers were asked to justify their assertions regarding rubbish and wildfires. I accompanied the Gympie Forester and his secretary on an inspection of the beach. Perhaps because of our visits to individual camps, most litter had been removed and most campfires were out. There was not a lot of evidence that uncontrolled camping was a problem!

Despite the unpleasantness, the message to get a permit before camping was accepted and spread, and we had broken the back of uncontrolled beach camping. More importantly, six months later, the strip of State Forest along the beach was revoked, clearing the way for it to be added to the national park and giving us a more realistic tidal boundary.

In June 1984 Alan Chenoweth from head office and I surveyed a new, expanded camping ground at Freshwater, to allow us to reuse one of our camping grounds as a picnic area.

During the same month, management of Cooloola NP was split at the boundary between Widgee and Noosa Shires, and I took charge of the southern section. In northern Cooloola, newly promoted District Ranger Mark Johnston was directed to allow beach camping south of Little Freshwater to the Noosa Shire boundary, provided permits were obtained in advance. No camping was permitted between Little Freshwater and Double Island Point.

Noosa River

In the early years, control of camping along the Noosa River near Harrys Hut resulted in my advising staff to tread warily, implementing a softly, softly approach. Initially, we could not enforce anything on the Noosa Shire Council esplanade. Our approach was to tactfully appeal to the good sense of visitors to camp fifteen metres back from the water's edge, and explain the problems caused by over-use of the banks.

QNPWS had total protection of wildlife within national parks. Boating and Fisheries Officers controlled fishing in salt and estuarine areas. Their testing of water in the Noosa River north of

Camp Site 3 had shown it was saline and therefore under their control. Our gazettal map showed that the river from near this point northerly was inside the national park. This never became an issue, as I instructed staff not to become enthusiastic about enforcement.

Control of power boats in the upper reaches of the river, especially the tourist vessels, was discussed internally, but local politician Gordon Simpson's ideas of opening the area for tourism, meant it was a matter for the future. The control of house boats north of Kinaba Island was another matter. They were running aground in the shallows and being caught up in overhanging branches. The issue wasn't ours to enforce, but it wasn't difficult to discourage private house boats by explaining likely problems and enlisting the support of hire boat owners to prohibit their boats upstream of Lake Cootharaba.

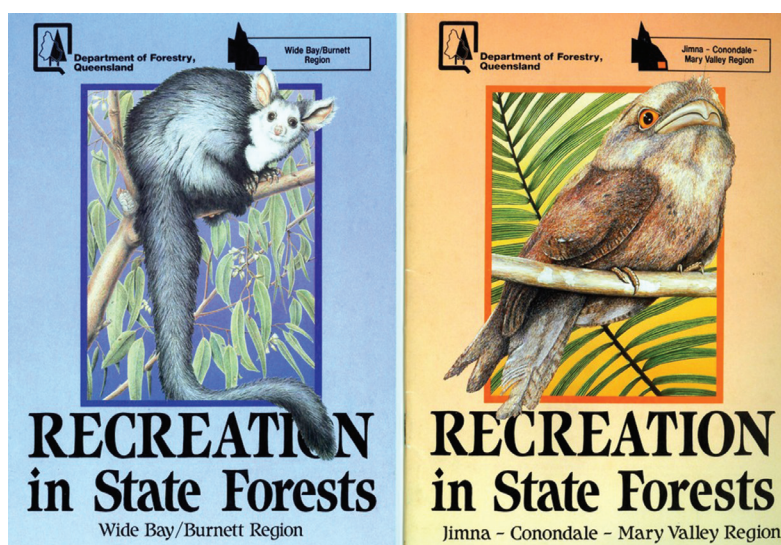
Bunya Mountains NP

In 1983 an similar out-of-control camping situation existed at the Bunya Mountains. Over-crowding, blocked toilets and flooded septic lines were the norm, and it wasn't hard to enlist staff support for change. As numbers were limited, I insisted that visitors gained a permit before camping. The first night of a holiday period would see me on duty right through the night, dozing occasionally. With my vehicle blocking access to the camping area, I checked permit-holders into the camp grounds.

Camping on State Forests

Another major change, which helped us withstand the pressure for camping in Cooloola and the Bunya Mountains, was Forestry's perception that they had to do more to show they were true conservationists. The developing conservation lobby was critical of their management and their unsympathetic approach to protecting some State Forests as national parks. Within Forestry ranks, recently graduated foresters seemed to have a greater conservation ethic.

In the early 1980s the Forestry Department moved into outdoor recreation with camping areas, forest drives, walking tracks, leaflets and good quality booklets. Major camping areas were developed in the Conondale Ranges but were quickly overwhelmed by visitors. The demand for camping doubled between 1981 and 1985, resulting in restrictions on permits and balloting at peak periods.



Well presented Department of Forestry booklets.

13

THE TEEWAH CREEK BRIDGE

Teewah Creek^[1] is a major tributary of the Noosa River. Early timber-getters erected a bridge across it to access valuable timbers in the southern forests of the Cooloola Sandmass. Bullock teams used this bridge to haul logs to Store (now Carland) Creek, from where they were rafted to Maryborough.

A solid replacement bridge was built by the Army to facilitate access to the coast during the Second World War. It was supported by piers, spanned by round logs and topped with heavy plank decking. Abutment planking was used to protect the creek banks.

By 1975 the bridge had been abandoned as unsafe. Erosion around one of the main support piers was causing a log spanning the creek to subside. Adventurous 4WD enthusiasts kept repairing the bridge decking, using loose planks and rusty sheets of reinforcing weldmesh to help spread the load. After floods, visitors would retrieve planks from the creek and re-lay them onto the deck to facilitate a vehicular crossing. It was incumbent upon QNPWS to either make the bridge safe or render it unusable. Considering the misuse of the central Cooloola area and serious erosion along the tracks, we had neither the desire or the funds to replace it.



Old Teewah Creek bridge, 1980 (photo B. Thomas).



Track to Teewah Bridge ca 1990 (photo Queensland Government).

The surrounding treeless Noosa Plains were home to many different wildflowers, the most spectacular of which were the red and yellow Christmas Bells. The springtime wildflower display drew many visitors to the area. The Cooloola Sand Patch, several kilometres away, could be seen across the plains. In terms of flora, fauna and geology, this fragile, erosion-prone area was of great importance to scientists and needed special protection.

I always looked for jabirus or brolgas on the heath plains in the vicinity of Teewah Creek. Small mobs of emus were also about, but were seen only occasionally, and it was a rare delight to encounter a red-winged parrot. An elderly resident of Goomboorian told me that these birds were formerly common around the wallum country. This habitat was also home to other rare birds, including the ground parrot, southern emu wren and ground-nesting grass owl.

Wherever there were fresh or brackish waterholes or creeks in Cooloola, 4WD tracks led off through the heath from the firebreak tracks, giving access for bass fishermen. Residual campfires and rubbish were to be seen at these fishing spots.

Camping was occurring near the Teewah Creek Bridge, and the area adjacent to the creek was bare, with much loose sand. It had been a major encampment for a mining company carrying out exploratory work. The miners were reproached by Forestry, who repeatedly asked for this and other sites to be cleaned up and restored.

The bridge over Teewah Creek was used as a shortcut to access Teewah Beach via the Kings Bore (or Military) Road. Most vehicles kept to the track, but drivers crossing the creek then going down the Western Firebreak towards the Noosa River seemed more interested in off-road driving, even trying to reach the Cooloola Sand Patch. This highly visible sandblow attracted those who would sooner drive across the vegetation than walk.

Forestry and logging contractors left us a myriad of logging and other access tracks in this area, most sections of which were in poor condition or had been abandoned. Their grading of the tracks would invariably create a channel from which running water could not escape in this gently sloping country. Heavy rainfall quickly scoured tracks, and this was made worse by increasing 4WD usage. As one track became unusable, another would be formed nearby. This would, in turn, be abandoned, and yet another opened.

The damage was so bad that, by 1984, Forestry sought QNPWS permission for a new logging access road and a bridge to cross the creek. In this prime ground parrot habitat, public vehicular access would increase our management problems. QNPWS dropped a bombshell when it said 'No!'

Just four weeks prior to the declaration of Cooloola National Park in 1975, a notice in the *Government Gazette* empowered the Widgee Shire Council to take water from Teewah Creek for the townships of Tin Can Bay, Rainbow Beach, and the recently approved Bayside Village, now known as Cooloola Cove. This Bayside Village development allowed for 1600 residential allotments. Its major proponents were a consortium of local people. Dr Harrold advised me that he had interpreted the application as being for Teewah Creek near Bayside Village, not the Tewah Creek that flows into the Noosa River. He was aghast at the intrusion of overhead power lines and a road across the national park, and tried unsuccessfully to have the power line placed underground and the poles removed. Pumping units were installed some distance upstream from Teewah Bridge.^[2]

For some years, senior QNPWS staff had commented that the Teewah Bridge was unsafe. Cr Ned Kelly had made his attitude clear. QNPWS should provide a major tourist road and creek crossing, with improved access to the Noosa River. He also sought excision of an east-west road reserve from

the Cooloola Way at Coops Corner to Teewah Creek. This seemingly innocuous proposal was needed to safeguard access to Council's water extraction point on the creek. He also told me privately that he wanted the road extended to provide public access to Teewah Beach via the King's Bore Road.

This Teewah Creek crossing was the main route used by scores of Gympie Apex Club members for many years to access huts along Teewah Beach. As a former Apexian wrote later:

There were various ways to get to the huts – up the beach or down the Teewah power lines and over a rickety spider bridge which was closed by national parks, but we couldn't read the sign ...

Other routes to the Teewah Beach huts were available. One option was the Freshwater Track. Two others, from Camp Milo, used either the Pettigrew Road or the Western Firebreak. Logs provided other low-level crossings of Teewah Creek not far upstream. Our attitude to these alternative crossings in the 1980s was 'user beware', but they were solidly made.

The Teewah Creek Bridge was dangerous – an accident waiting to happen. In 1985, I slowly and repeatedly soaked one of the logs that spanned it with a mixture of distillate and petrol, and set it alight. The bridge wasn't completely destroyed – it was too well-built – but it was certainly beyond use!

After this action, undesirable behaviour on the eastern side of the Noosa River diminished. Staff at Kinaba increased their patrols of the river. Freshwater staff were not able to visit the area often, as they were over-committed with camping pressures, but I continued to visit the area, checking for illegal camping and listening for the evening call of ground parrots.

Endnotes

¹ The spelling of this delightful stream has, by recent usage, been defined as Teewah Creek. A 1920 Lands Department map shows it as Tewah Creek. The 1925 Government Gazette, which reserved the area as State Forest also gives the spelling as Tewah Creek. For the next 60 years Forestry and Lands Department maps continue that spelling. QNPWS mapping adopted the spelling as 'Teewah' in the early 1980s.

² With the passing of time and changes to personnel, it is interesting to hear alternatives advanced that were just not possible forty years ago. Council has been drawing a superior quality water from bores for many years, and this now appears to be their preferred option.



Access to the beach 1984 (photo B. Thomas).



Forestry bridge across Teewah Creek (photo B. Thomas).

14

FIRE MANAGEMENT

As a newly arrived District Ranger, I heard dramatic tales about early Forestry fire management in Cooloola. One technique, known as 'The Scorpion', involved placing a bulk drum of petrol/diesel mix on the back of a truck and, starting above the coloured sand cliffs of Wide Bay, driving down the Eastern Firebreak and past Lake Freshwater towards the Cooloola Sand Patch. At the start of this run, a tap would be opened and a jet of fuel would spray into adjacent vegetation, which was then lit. This was a cheap way of edge lighting but took no account of conservation values.

Some senior Forest Rangers told stories about fires that seemed to escape when the weekend was approaching, forcing overtime rates to be paid to staff. We had a classic case of this one winter's evening in 1983, when a fire that Forestry staff and I had checked and considered safe was found to have 'somehow' jumped the break during the night. Unexplained tyre marks were evident next morning near the point where the fire had crossed the track, and the fire was now burning out of control.

There was fog over the heath country, and at 7am I measured a temperature of 10 degrees and 100% humidity, with a heavy dew. The heat from the fire in this metre- high, dense heath was too great for a frontal attack. My attempt to cut a firebreak through the vegetation damaged the curved-shaft brush-cutter I was using. There was nothing to do but fall back to the next firebreak and back burn.

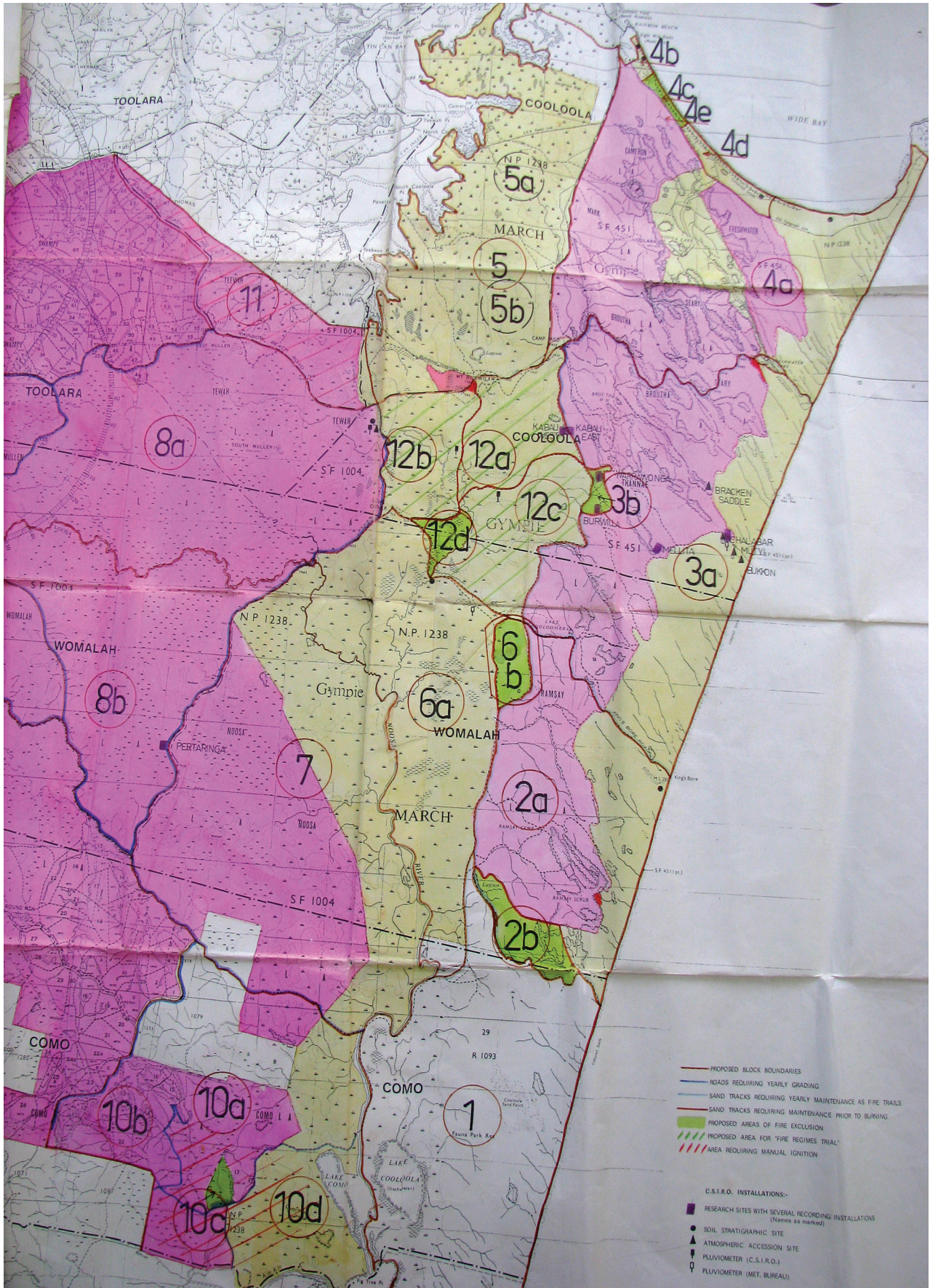
The Cooloola Fire Plan

There was a defined plan to burn sections of Cooloola annually. Forestry and QNPWS had drawn up a plan which divided the area between the coast and the exotic pine plantations into about 25 blocks, the largest of which was 5,000 hectares. Most of these were scheduled to be burnt in rotation every three years. A few small areas were scheduled to have fire excluded for scientific research.

It seemed to Tom Ryan and me that the plan had been devised to protect Forestry's pine plantations and the core of State Forest 451. At our annual inter-departmental meetings, the Toolara Forester would argue in support of scheduled burning, claiming that uncontrolled camp fires on Teewah Beach posed a danger to the forest estate. Early Forestry files mention the risk to hardwood forests from these fires. Harder to define were the conflagrations that raged as a result of legal and illegal grazing.

The Beerburrum Forester had a similar attitude towards fire in national parks. While Forestry officers were naturally protective of their estate and sought to minimize external risks, I thought they could be compared with some farmers, who blamed national parks for all their problems! Later Foresters at Toolara and Beerburrum did not have the same antipathy towards national parks.

FIRE MANAGEMENT



Cooloola fire plan blocks. Yellow = national park; white No. 1 = fauna reserve; pink = state forest.

In the early days, QNPWS was responsible for fire control, but had no finance to cover costs and no radio network. Around the region, each national park operated independently. There was no system to bring in back-up crews, because, apart from Noosa, Bunya Mountains and Woodgate, we lacked 4WD vehicles and equipment. The Freshwater 4WD was unreliable, and the two staff there had only hand tools. In Cooloola, all we could do was attend the annual Forestry pre-burn meetings and assist operations as much as possible.

In the early 1980s new 4WD vehicles, provided with two-way radios linked to the Forestry network, were supplied to Kondalilla, Freshwater and Gympie. Soon afterwards, 450 litre slip-on fire-fighting units arrived. Moving staff and equipment between parks to attend wildfires and assist with fuel reduction burning became accepted.

Aerial Burning

'Flight Line One' was a training film, explaining the development in Western Australia of aerial burning across large forested areas. This burning was aimed at protecting the hardwood resource, and it tended to be total and hot. The West Australian method was adopted by Forestry departments in other States, but questions soon emerged. Conservationists argued that it resulted in a dramatic spread of the insidious root rot pathogen, *Phytophthora cinnamomi*.

The basic aim of fuel reduction burning in State forests was protection of the forest resource, mainly timber. In national parks, the aim was to mitigate the effects of wildfire and achieve a mosaic of burnt and unburnt vegetation, leaving a reserve of seed for regeneration and food for native fauna. The fires should not be too hot, as scorching upper layers leads to early leaf fall and rapid replacement of the burnt litter layer.

In 1978, aerial prescribed burning took place at Cooloola, using fixed wing aircraft. On one occasion, as navigator, I was too slow to stop the ejection of incendiary capsules when approaching a bend on the Western Firebreak, and I feared the worst. Two Freshwater staff were instructed to telephone me before 8.30am next morning, but they collected rubbish and had their smoko before checking the fire. At 11.30am they phoned to say that the fire had escaped. As the wind rose, this fire destroyed years of important CSIRO research and equipment.

In 1981, a helicopter was used for fuel reduction burning, with Jim Campbell as pilot. He was an ex-Vietnam military pilot, and I would occasionally fly with him as navigator over park areas. I defined the boundaries within which the burn was to take place, and he did the rest. A bombardier sat in the rear of the helicopter with specially designed equipment holding spherical plastic capsules containing potassium permanganate, and a separate container of glycol. Moments before the capsules were individually ejected from the helicopter, they were injected with glycol. The flying height was calculated to allow twenty seconds for the ejected capsules to reach the ground before they ignited.

Sometimes the capsule ejection machine would jam at the outlet, and this called for quick action. The bombardier kept a 'Panic Stick' nearby to free the blockage. If any jam was bad, we were instructed to spray the capsule from a soda water bottle, or use the fire extinguisher. After that, we prayed! In a fixed wing aircraft, such an event was breath-holding, but the helicopter pilot merely dropped his machine to earth so we could clear the ejection area beneath the helicopter. I recall one such incident when the machine jammed while flying over the old Telegraph Track, and Jim dropped the helicopter in a rapid, stomach-lifting descent to the beach below. Park staff had to get approval before flying, for insurance purposes.

The Need For Research

Tom Ryan and I disliked the domination of fire management by 'big brother' Forestry. We questioned the concept of the scheduled, three year rotational burning, which did not take into account vegetation types, the intervening weather, and whether the area had recovered sufficiently from the last burn. As we learned more about the areas under our control, we started to raise questions. Since we had to pay half the cost of operations that mainly protected State Forests, we started to say 'No'.

We observed that too-frequent burning was destroying regeneration and believed that research was urgently needed. Carolyn Sandercoe, a recently graduated botanist, was employed by QNPWS and proved to be a strong advocate, who helped to break the Forestry stranglehold over burning in Cooloolool NP.

Carolyn livened up discussions and upset older, more experienced staff by arguing the case to extend the period between reduction burnings. However, her ideas were not practical at that time, because Tom and I were responsible for visitor safety, controlling fires close to townships, camp grounds and roads with few staff, little equipment, and poor regional co-ordination. This is not to say we didn't subscribe to Carolyn's ideas. It was just too early in the development of QNPWS in our region.

Carolyn then began the fuel sampling research on which we could base our operations, and extended her work by preparing a vegetation map of the Cooloolool Sandmass. Annual meetings were held at Toolara to plan the forth-coming season's fuel reduction burning. When Carolyn presented her arguments against any burning in the park, a forester exploded, 'We've got to burn something!'

At one of these meetings I argued that, if fuel reduction burning were to be carried out less frequently, we needed better firebreaks. Existing firebreak tracks were overgrown and some required widening to allow vehicles to turn. My point was accepted, and in 1984 money was provided to employ a contractor to widen critical firebreaks within the national park.

Years later, at a meeting in QNPWS head office with senior Forestry staff, Carolyn spoke about Cooloolool-based science, which demonstrated that some species of plants in the park were in danger of being burnt to extinction. The three-year burning regime was shorter than the time required for these species to produce viable seed.

More research was needed, and David MacFarland was employed to study the relationship between fire and the food needs of the rare ground parrot. His early research, which indicated that there should be a gap of eight to ten years between fires on heathland plains, was accepted.



Fire damaged scribbly gum.



Newly created firebreak (photo D. Batt).

However, Foresters were unhappy about the buildup of fuel in the Western Catchment of the Noosa River, which had been added to the national park in 1983. Extending burning for eight to ten years might threaten their extensive pine plantations along the Como Scarp. Carolyn stated that there were at least 100 plant species in the Western Catchment that did not occur in the national park east of the river. These needed protection and we were reluctant to burn every three years. When pressed, the Foresters said they needed a minimum half-kilometre-wide strip as a firebreak. So Tom Ryan asked, 'Why burn the whole catchment when a half kilometre strip would do?'

Peter Cranny, Assistant Conservator of Forestry, advanced a compromise, calling for precise planning regarding fuel loads, recent weather and time for ignition. Edge lighting would take place along the Como Scarp firebreak, in late afternoon, while a helicopter dropped incendiary capsules downslope for 400 metres. It was predicted that the fire would move downslope 100 metres before going out in the cool of the evening. All went well with this plan. We had protected the Western Catchment from the existing burning regime.

In 1988, with the appointment of Forester John Tadman, there was a shift in emphasis towards fire protection. Forest Ranger Kevin Pengelly, whom I had long admired for his ability with fuel reduction operations in the Glass House Mountains, was part of this attitudinal change. Forestry had no desire to burn the remaining core of State Forest 451, nor were they as concerned about the risk of wildfire emanating from the beach or the Western Catchment. Discussion concentrated on sharing the maintenance costs of grading roads in the Western Catchment and re-drawing a fire plan for Cooloola.

Possibly the biggest factor in easing the strain between our departments was Forestry's new found ability to reduce fuel loads in pine forests with fuel reduction burning. Also, freshly graduated foresters tended to have a better perspective on environmental issues.

Rainbow Beach

QNPWS, Forestry and the town brigade carried out fuel reduction burning at Rainbow Beach. In 1981 we assisted Forestry to burn around the edge of the township near the Mikado Inn Motel. This building had been approved right on the edge of a steep, bush-covered slope without an adequate fire break and it was not equipped to deal with fire. A one tonne gas tank was installed, partly in the park, within metres of the building. Any fire on the slope below would be impossible to contain.

In 1983, Forestry cooperated with QNPWS to again burn around the Mikado. We needed their large tankers, with longer hoses and greater water pressure, to reach across the front of the building. We provided three 450 litre slip-on fire tankers, two staff from Noosa and two from Mapleton. Les Boyce, the local brigade captain, assisted. The managers of the Mikado were not pleased. The smell of smoke and burnt woodland had permeated the building, and this was not good for business.

Arson Fires

Most of the fires within parks around the region stemmed from arson or suspected arson and many coincided with school holidays. In the early years, there was little we could do about these fires, and we tended to find out after the event anyhow.

The most popular area for arson fires in Cooloola occurred near Poverty Point. Most of the fires were minor, and I assumed that the person responsible was a local resident trying to maintain access to favoured fishing spots.

In 1980 a series of fires took place along access tracks at Double Island Point. A group of professional fire fighters from Brisbane were camping nearby. I was advised by other campers that, after dark, a vehicle left the firemen's camp and drove along the Leisha Track. Shortly afterwards, the glow of a fire was noticed, followed by what appeared to be other fires further away. Strange, two-way radio calls were made in a slurred voice, reporting a series of fires across the Leisha Track, then other fires across the Fishermen's Track, from where the vehicle returned. The best information I could get from the firemen was that their friend was acting strangely.

Another arson fire occurred in 1983, just north of Freshwater. My son Neale and I travelled there and commenced back burning through the night along the Freshwater Road. Due to a temperature inversion, where a layer of warm air is trapped above the vegetation, this fire burnt fiercely in the night and early hours of the morning.

In December 1983, a fire occurred near the Cooloola Cove airstrip. It burnt across Pipeclay NP and headed south-easterly. Christmas Day saw Bill French and me back-burning along the Carland Creek access track in Cooloola NP. Like all fire fighters, we turned our faces to the sky and prayed for rain, which came and didn't stop for days.

The Kinaba Centre recorded 250 mm of rain, and on 31 December Dave Batt telephoned to advise that a major flood was coming down the Noosa River. A family of campers at Harrys Hut was cut off in a 2WD car and needed to get out. Responding to the call, I found the last kilometre of the road to Harrys Hut was under water. I slid my feet across the boarded top of the first bridge and found one plank had gone. With some difficulty, I drove through the water, but I had forgotten the broad, deep hollows along this section of track until I found the bow-wave lapping the base of the windscreen wipers. With its diesel motor, the vehicle kept going, and I came up out of the hollow and let my breath out.

Harrys Hut was surrounded by water, and Dave was there with a number of people. Two couples had erected tents on the verandah, strung up coloured tinsel, clothing and papers to see the New Year in, and seemed to be looking forward to a party with a difference.

Further upstream, on a more elevated area, the advance leaders of a church group I knew from previous visits, were sitting on a mountain of food, but their 25 expected young people couldn't get into the area. The well-fed leaders, however, were 'quite comfortable, thank you'.

A family group wanted to leave. I loaded them and their canoe into my vehicle and left their car behind. This time, Dave waded in front and found a shallower route around the edge of the hollows on the track.

As part of fire preparation at Kinaba, I had purchased a portable pump and motor to fit our boat. I scrounged hoses and fittings from the Gympie Fire Brigade and capsules of potassium permanganate from Forestry. Using petty cash, I bought vehicle anti-freeze containing glycol from local auto shops.



Harrys camping area 1983 (photo D. Batt).



Arson fire approaching Noosa River 1985.

In 1985, an arson fire near the junction of the Noosa River and the Cooloola Way was spreading southwards in a modest breeze. The following day Dave Batt, Stan Powell and I boated slowly upstream along the Noosa River, complete with the Kinaba pump and ready for action.

Stan and I were working as a team, one priming incendiary capsules with anti-freeze and the other throwing them into adjacent vegetation to start a back burn. With broken and damaged capsules and spilt potassium permanganate, our hands and feet and the floor of the boat soon became purple.

As the fire front reached the river, we dropped the pump intake over the stern and dampened the fire, throwing a massive volume of water fifteen metres into the vegetation, as we motored upstream. The fire had jumped the river not far south of Camp Site 3 and the Fauna

Reserve was alight. There were no firebreaks to stop the fire reaching the North Shore, but fortunately, our pump and hand tools ensured that the outbreak was completely extinguished.

At dusk, we secured the boat at Eurubbie Road and went home. Next morning, a radio message told us that the stern of the boat, its twin outboard motors and our fire pump were under water! In a deliberate act of sabotage, the drainage bungs had been unscrewed after we left.

The reaction of senior staff to the unforeseen expense of a sunken boat was an instruction to have the drain plugs welded or fixed with araldite so they couldn't be removed. 'Bilge water can be mopped up by hand,' we were told. No commendations were forthcoming regarding our efforts in containing the fire!

Some months later, while I was paddling my kayak on the still, mist-covered waters of the river just after dawn, 145 yellow-tailed black cockatoos slowly drifted in from the east and settled on the seed capsules of the banksias and hakeas that had previously been burnt.

False Alarms

During hot weather, I kept my two-way radio on while at home. In 1981, a spotter in Mt Elliott fire tower reported a fire behind Rainbow Beach. Investigating along the old Telegraph Track, I wondered what was going on because there was no smell of smoke. Receiving a fresh compass bearing confirming that billowing clouds of smoke were still visible, I travelled to Freshwater and down Teewah Beach. As I looked out to sea, the mystery cleared. The spotter in the tower was mistaking a bank of cumulus clouds for a fire. It was a case of another day-off lost.

Fraser Island

In 1983, Tom Ryan advised me of a fire on Fraser Island. I drove along the beach to Indian Head and took compass bearings on a large fire burning in an area south of Orchid Beach. Although the fire was remote, I instructed Overseer Ron Walk to cut down all banksias overhanging the east-west 'A' road, which might be our only line of defence to stop the fire spreading into State Forest. The 'A' road, which traversed the island, was not a good firebreak, and the dry banksia cones could create an extra hazard if we needed to back burn.

Returning to Gympie, I contacted staff from other parks to be prepared to assist on Fraser Island. Next day, Tom Ryan advised me that the fire had travelled rapidly southward during the night. Tom and I were on the same wavelength when discussing this fire. We had to do everything possible to stop it spreading, but, if there was no threat to life or property, it could burn itself out.

Back on the island that night, Lindsay Pringle and I travelled in convoy up the beach. Confronted by a strong wind, a rising tide and a flooded creek, we decided to wait for daylight. During the night, the wind whipped the sand around our wheels, and we kept moving our vehicles to prevent them sinking slowly into the sand.

Arriving at Dundubara park headquarters, we found the hot fire was still advancing southwards. Ron Walk was clearing banksias along the 'A' road, so I despatched relief staff to continue this work. Men from Forestry and the Happy Valley Rural Fire Brigade arrived to assist with back burning. At nightfall, teams were allocated a stretch of road to light up and then patrol to prevent spot-overs. With 35 men and their tankers, this was the largest fire suppression effort in which I was ever involved.

Next day, an unprepared section of the 'A' road presented a serious risk, just as the main fire

front approached. The uncleared banksias gave me many heart-stopping moments with minor spot-overs, but we held the line as we continued back burning towards Sandy Strait. When the Forestry and Brigade withdrew, QNPWS continued wetting down. QNPWS and Forestry expenses were about the same, so each party covered its own costs. Ron Walk provided fuel to the Happy Valley Fire Brigade as a token payment for their efforts.

Back in Gympie, I had just started to clean my vehicle and equipment when another call advised that there was a fire in Noosa River National Park. Regrettably, a number of arson fires had occurred in this park over the years, and it was here I had helped Dr Harrold to search unsuccessfully for a rare *Habenaria* orchid. Perhaps an over-abundance of fire had led to its decline?

To investigate the causes of the Fraser Island fire, I flew to Orchid Beach Resort and interviewed the manager, who had seen smoke visible to the south. She informed me that two Telecom workers had been staying there on the day the fire started. These men had returned before they were expected, packed up, and left in a hurry. They told her they had been cleaning out the shed at their radio tower and had thrown some aerosol cans of insecticide onto the fire. These exploded and the fire got away. Travelling to the shed, I found evidence corroborating this story, and recovered a few of the cans, some of which had partially unburnt paper wrappers.

I telephoned the manufacturers of the cans asking for details, in particular the possibility of the cans exploding if left in strong sunlight. The partially burnt wrappers indicated that this product had been made expressly for Telecom. The evidence supported a case against Telecom, and my reports were followed up. Telecom was unhelpful, saying the workers had left the district and would not be returning.

This matter, which became known as the Telecom Fire, dragged on for years. At Moggill, I was interrogated by the Chief Wildlife Officer and a member of the police fauna squad, who were to present a report that could be used to sue the Commonwealth for costs. I understand the matter was eventually settled out of court.

Woodgate NP

Woodgate was another hot spot in relation to arson fires. Some locals claimed that the national park was a threat to the township, but little was being done to mitigate the effects of fire. Most of the back yards near the park were overgrown with vegetation, and apart from hand tools, the Overseer had no fire equipment.

In 1980, a wildfire broke out in the western section of Woodgate NP. Tom Ryan and I used a bulldozer to make a firebreak, cutting the fire off from the township. Although the fire seemed contained, I slept overnight on site, in case a spot-over should occur, or someone should be wandering around helping the fire along. Looking back at the township in the early morning, I was disgusted to see that a new fire had been lit inside the national park. I was now between two fires and it was time to leave along the fire break!

In 1982, another fire occurred in the southern section of Woodgate NP. This threatened the foredunes, Walker's Point township and the toilet block and windmill in our camping area. Using the small park generator, I connected my 240 volt electric pump to two 200 litre drums of water in the tray of my vehicle. I manned the firehose and successfully wet down the fire along the edge of the road.

As a result of these fires, I participated in a planning committee at the Bundaberg office of the Rural Fire Board to prepare a fire plan for Woodgate. The main problem was the propensity of sugar cane farmers living or holidaying in the township to drop a few matches without caring where the fire might go.

There was a 100 metre-wide strip of Council-controlled bushland at the rear of the township, and I considered it pointless to use the legal park boundary as a firebreak. I proposed to use this land as a green firebreak, slashing all shrubbery on the strip at least annually, and leaving the mature trees, from which low limbs would be removed. This would not be expensive to prepare and maintain and would be a park-like area with kangaroo viewing for tourists. Chuck Wilder congratulated me on this fire-plan, which was put into practice.

Noosa NP

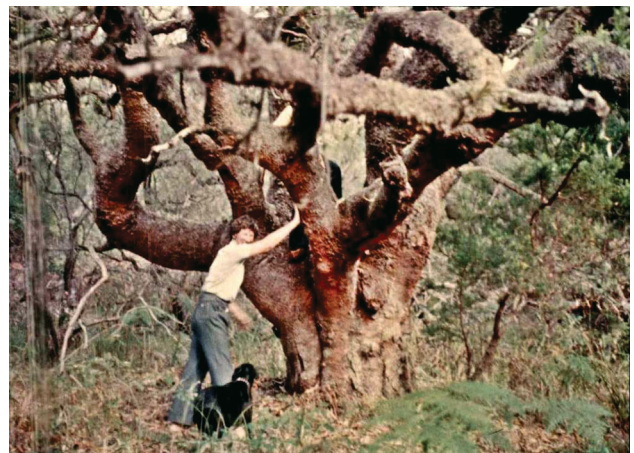
Fuel loads in Noosa National Park were very heavy, and the community was concerned because the park hadn't been burnt for 20 years. A movie taken by Forestry in the 1950s showed how open the vegetation had been along the foreshore. Regrowth had made this area unrecognisable.

In 1980 fuel reduction burning was carried out. During this exercise, I gained an idea of Ganger Ned Pinwell's honest attitude to work. Fred Lamont had told him to walk back and forth along a particular fireline, and hours later he would not put his knapsack down to have a rest, even when I suggested it.

In 1981, an arson fire travelled uphill from Granite Bay. Walking out of the darkness, I saw my son Neale, acting on his own initiative, carrying a 20-litre knapsack loaded with sea water up the slope above the walking track. The fire brigade were on hand, and had deferred to his directions as a QNPWS employee.

Council then requested me to prepare a fire plan for the Noosa North Shore. This complex area of freehold and scrubby Crown lands had nothing to do with QNPWS, and I resisted involvement. A Noosa Shire planning officer was pushing hard for a burn to take place around the township of Teewah and from discussions with Cr Olive Macklin (generally over a cup of tea). I knew the major issue was the lack of fire breaks between the township and the national park. Cr Macklin, who owned a cottage at Teewah, was concerned that some ancient banksias adjoining the village might be destroyed in a wildfire.

The Noosa Fire Brigade stated that they had no responsibility for wildfire suppression or controlled burning outside reticulated areas. This left QNPWS as the only organisation with staff and equipment. Shire Engineer Peter Wright organised a survey of the boundary at the rear of the village and provided a machine to clear a double firebreak. With staff and equipment from Noosa, Elanda and Kondalilla, we proceeded with a controlled burn between the firebreaks, which went as planned. Cr Macklin offered her thanks and another cup of tea!



Ancient banksia; worth protecting (photo Queensland Government).

Conondales

On an occasion of very high fire danger, Forestry had a spotter aircraft over the Conondale Ranges, and as I listened to my radio, a drama unfolded. The observer reported a series of arson fires along roads leading to and past NP477. He could see a man driving along the road, lighting these fires. A Forestry vehicle was despatched and caught the man red-handed. I knew that this man was well connected politically. He had a Stock Grazing Permit from Forestry to graze cattle on the State Forest (but not in the national parks) and he controlled a vital logging egress route from the ranges. No legal action was taken and illegal burning continued.

I pleaded with frustrated Forestry officers to stop this burning off near NP477, but this man seemed to have protected status. The very rare Eastern bristlebird lived in this area and frequent burning was adversely impacting it.

Ravensbourne NP

In 1980 I was asked to attend a fire below the picnic area in Ravensbourne NP. The fire was burning steadily, and Overseer Archie Zroph and I started suppression measures using hand tools. I liked a particular tree, a forest giant, around the base of which lay many years of accumulated leaf litter. Much to Archie's surprise, I used my rakhoe to pull the mass of burning litter away from the base of the tree, saving it from a fire scar which could lead to a rapid demise. Archie considered this a waste of energy, but his expression changed to shock when I gave the tree a hug – just for his benefit!

Glasshouse Mountains

The Forester at Beerburum was not a fan of national parks. He considered that the four Glasshouse Mountains national parks presented a threat to pine plantations when fire raced up the slopes and spotted forward into the pines.

Requests to have other mountains in this area converted to national parks had been consistently denied by Forestry. When I first met the Forester in 1978, he sought my approval to extend a fire line he had bulldozed in one national park. He also sought approval to burn each of the parks every two to three years.

His replacements at Beerburum, Terry Vowles and Graeme Hiley, considered they had little to worry about from the national parks. This feeling did not extend to members of the Rural Fire Brigade, who had requested permission to burn Ngun Ngun NP, from the bottom upwards. I denied this request, but offered the brigade a joint operation if they would obtain permits and advise neighbours. Park staff would ignite the upper slopes of the mountain, and, when advised, the brigade would burn the lower sections.

Lindsay Pringle, Ian Steele and I climbed to the top of Mt Ngun Ngun, and commenced burning using surplus ex-Forestry incendiary capsules. These were injected with glycol and thrown over the cliffs, starting numerous spot fires. Ian hiked around the contour at a lower level with a drip torch, creating a mosaic of fire. When much of the upper slopes were burnt and evening was approaching, I used my two-way radio to ask the fire brigade to proceed with their edge lighting. In this way, we saved the park from the pyrotechnic displays I had heard about, when locals lit around the roads and watched the fires race up the mountain. QNPWS had come of age!

15 COOLOOLA WILDERNESS TRAIL

In 1985, friends alerted me to the forth-coming sesqui-centenary of the shipwreck and rescue of Eliza Fraser, and invited me to join a small committee, formed to plan the celebration. Kinaba staff, Dave Batt, Stan Powell and I decided to make a long distance wilderness walking trail through the Western Catchment of the Noosa River to mark the event.

In 1836, Captain James Fraser's wife Eliza was on board the two-masted, square-rigged *Stirling Castle* when it was wrecked on the Great Barrier Reef. After making landfall on the northern end of Fraser Island, Eliza moved with Aborigines to the mainland.

An intriguing version of this event was reported to white explorers in 1842. David Bracewell, a second escaped convict still living in the area, claimed to have led her into the waters of Tin Can Bay and along a creek with '*brooks and pools*', then further south to an area where they '*sheltered overnight in the rocks*'. Next day, the fleeing couple travelled south to an Aboriginal camp near Lake Cootharaba, now in the national park.



Carland Creek with one of its '*brooks and pools*'.

John Graham, a convict who had lived with the Aboriginals in this area, guided a rescue party from the Moreton Bay penal settlement and eventually located her at that camp. She was taken across to Teewah Beach to a point near the current Teewah Village, to join a waiting rescue party.

I attended several meetings of the Eliza Fraser Committee. In August 1986, Neil Buchanan and Barry Dwyer launched their book on the Eliza Fraser story, an improvement on previous accounts. Souvenirs, such as medallions and etched drinking glasses were produced.

An early concept, considered with local staff and Geoff Brown, was a walking track to traverse the length of Fraser Island. If a link track from Inskip Point across the park to the southern end of Tin Can Inlet could be made, it could continue across the Western Catchment and create an historically significant, world-class route.

Assuming that Bracefell's creek with 'brooks and pools' was the stream now known as Carland Creek, I looked for the starting point of my proposed walking track on Rainbow Beach Road near the Cooloola Way. This low-lying area was too wet and too close to the sound of vehicular traffic.

A major issue was the need for an entrance and a car park that Main Roads engineer (and QNPWS Honorary Protector) Bill Bauer would accept. For safety, he required a sight clearance of 100 metres in each direction for slow-moving traffic leaving the car park and entering the sealed Rainbow Beach Road. My starting point moved progressively west from Carland Creek to the Como Scarp near East Mullen, where Forestry allowed me to develop a car park at the edge of the State Forest. Approved by Bill Bauer, this became the Mullen car park.

I knew of two lovely lagoons in this wallum country, one each side of the Cooloola Way, which had potential as wilderness camping areas, and as refuges for walkers against wildfire. One of these, Neefs Waterhole, was named after Johannes Neeb, an early Wolvi settler, who would camp here and fish for bass. Since David Bracewell had little official recognition, I gave the second, un-named waterhole his Aboriginal name of 'Wandi'. Rocky areas are not common in Cooloola, but the over-night refuge of Bracewell and Eliza Fraser could have been close to this waterhole.



Wandi wilderness camping area (photo D. Batt)

The existence of *Tarangau*, a private property, then forced my theoretical route easterly towards the Noosa River. An advantage here was the existence of Harrys Camping Area. The trail would then traverse inland, to cross Kin Kin Creek and finish at Elanda Point. My theoretical route evolved into a 46km walking track, crossing different landscapes and historically important localities.

I did not have aerial photography to use, but volunteers from the Noosa Parks Association – Honorary Protector George Oxenborough and Vic Collins assisted me to locate a route across the wilderness. I had been exploring alone in this country, and their presence added to my sense of safety. The swampy drainage lines encountered were difficult to cross. Occasionally we had to back-track, remove flagging tape, and explore afresh when the country became too difficult.

Dave Batt had left to take up a position at Gatton, and other full-time staff were too busy to assist. A large arson fire was lit in February 1986, downstream from the Noosa River-Cooloola Way junction, in a stiff northerly breeze. Its immediate impact was the loss of the flagging tape used to mark about 12 kilometres of the route. This had to be redefined in a now blackened and very dirty landscape.

One of the young female Gatton graduates at Moggill pressed hard to have the concept known as The Eliza Fraser Trail. My objections were based on two main grounds. Firstly, no one knew precisely the route taken by Eliza Fraser, which would have been along a defined Aboriginal track. The only evidence Bracewell gave was a description of a creek which accords with Carland Creek, and their sheltering overnight in rocks, which could have been in the vicinity of Lochs Pinch.

Secondly, I objected to the use of the word ‘trail’ pressing hard for the word ‘track’. In the current context the word ‘trail’ was more of an American term. Anyhow, I conceded the argument, and my track was to be known as a ‘trail’, but we reached a consensus of the name ‘Cooloola Wilderness Trail’ without mis-representing it as the route Eliza Fraser might have used.

With limited time available, many parties of volunteers made the track during a four-month period. I attended night meetings with the Sunshine Coast Bushwalkers at Buderim and the Gympie Field Naturalists Club to seek their involvement. Honorary Protectors, Friends of Parks and Wildlife and members of the Noosa Parks Association were heavily involved, as was a fishing club and my own family. The newly arrived Overseer at Elanda barely had time to do more than assist with re-flagging the burnt section and a small amount of track work.

Most of the track was opened by hand, using axes, and machetes or slashers. When the promise of a ride-on mower from Moggill failed to materialise, I commandeered stood-down 8hp Rover self-propelled mowers from national parks around my district to make the final cut. I developed a respect for the rough work these worn out old mowers handled.



Cooloola Wilderness Trail opening day. From left: QNPWS director G Saunders, L Stephen MLA Gympie, Shire Chairman A McClintock and Cr L Hanson (photo E. Brown).



Wilderness trail at Mullen end.

Part of my role as a volunteer was to co-ordinate activities and ensure there were adequate tools, spare parts and fuel, to maintain the units in the field. I also provided tea, coffee and sweet biscuits. Other works around the District had to be continued, but now with added pressure to complete this new track.

The day of the official opening approached with many guests invited. I hired a marquee and erected it adjacent to the new car park beside the Rainbow Beach Road. I brought my mosquito-proof hammock and camped the night to keep guard. Our Director, Dr Graham Saunders, officially opened the track on 16 August 1986, and a few keen people, including myself, started to walk. We had done the job within time limits, despite disappointments.

I would have liked more time to better research alternative routes for sections of the proposed track, if for no other reason than to rule them out absolutely. Later, a better route to cross the paperbark swamp south of the Harrys Hut road was located. It had been my intention to construct an elevated boardwalk across this swamp. Plans were developed and money was allocated but withdrawn.

Trail Blazers

Several months after the Cooloola Wilderness Trail was opened, I received a telephone call from a Sunshine Coast college. A determined teacher wanted his school to claim the honour of being the first to run the track. I did my best to dissuade him, but, at that time, I couldn't legally stop the venture.

On 12 June 1987, I was wandering quietly in bushland west of Lake Cootharaba with a .303 rifle, looking for a herd of escaped water buffalo. When I arrived at Elanda, Stan Powell advised that

a group of students from the Sunshine Coast college were running the track. They were expected to arrive at 12.30pm, but were now three hours overdue and their parents were very concerned.

I arranged for Stan to boat along Kin Kin Creek, then walk along the Service Road to the Harrys Hut Road junction, and wait for me. After refuelling my vehicle, I searched roads in the area, collected Stan, and drove to Harrys Hut, where a camper told us that runners had straggled through and commented that one person from their group was missing.

Taking Stan back to Kin Kin Creek, I then returned by road to Elanda, where I found a male teacher and the missing female student. After hurting her leg, she had been assisted to the Cooloola Way, where she was left alone while the teacher ran back to Mullen carpark for his vehicle. The arrival of teacher and student at Elanda created panic among waiting parents, particularly when the teacher set out across Elanda Plains at dusk to look for the rest of the group and returned alone.

Stan and I travelled by boat in the dark past Kinaba and into Fig Tree Lake, where I fired two noisy shots from my rifle into the still night air. A light winked at Fig Tree Point, where I identified myself and ascertained that a group of runners had been there a few hours earlier. They had seen the sign to Elanda, but had inexplicably kept going to Fig Tree Point, where they had to turn back. Lacking a spotlight, Stan and I moved slowly up Kin Kin Creek, bouncing off submerged logs. At times I again discharged two shots, and finally we heard faint cries of “Heellp, heellp”, ahead.

We located the runners at the end of the Service Road at 7.55pm. One unhappy adult was in charge of some ten students. His welcome was a curt ‘Who are you?’, and I had to coax details from him. Perhaps he was already thinking of an explanation for his principal on Monday morning.

The group were in a poor state. Formerly wet with perspiration, they were now cold and shivering. In their shorts and singlets, they were being attacked by mosquitoes, for which the area has an unenviable reputation. Two boys had swum the creek at dusk, but couldn’t find their way through the rainforest towards Elanda. They were now clad in plastic garbage bags, trying to conserve warmth, and I considered they were suffering the early stages of hypothermia.

Nightfall and darkness in the rainforest must have been daunting for city children. We squeezed the whole group into the boat cabin in an effort to promote body warmth. I contacted the Noosa Coast Guard by radio, asking them to advise Brian Mays at Elanda, where distraught parents were waiting. Returning down narrow Kin Kin Creek, Stan did an excellent job as captain, feeling his way in the dark, bumping gently over logs, the boat now riding deeper in the water. Occasionally, hitting a snag, the motor would tilt, with a sudden increase in noise.

The students were dead tired. We could have been two madmen in a boat going who knows where with a high powered rifle aboard! National park rangers didn’t carry firearms, did they? We didn’t have enough life jackets on board, but fortunately, Lake Cootharaba was calm, and we didn’t hit any illegal fishing nets. Arriving off Elanda at 8.45pm, we put the party off in knee deep water to wade 100 metres ashore. Stan had earned five hours’ overtime from my already over-stretched wages budget – and I received a ‘please explain’.

We were annoyed with this group. Their venture was ill-planned and they ignored advice. When we put them over the side of the boat, only one student turned and thanked us. The teacher said nothing at all! We received no contact from the parents.

On my Sunday off, I prepared a press statement. *The Gympie Times* and the *Noosa News* reported the incident. SEQ television sought further information, and took footage of the dense rainforest where the Cooloola Wilderness Trail crosses Harrys Hut Road.

The Principal of the school telephoned, and I called on him to explain that running along the track was not the reason it had been developed. Only the foolhardy would run through the forests in full daylight, and leaving any student alone was undesirable. (Only months earlier, I had come across marijuana plantations within two kilometres of where the female student had been left beside the road.) Cooloola straddles a change from temperate to tropical zones. The area lends itself to a quiet and appreciative, but wary, contemplation of the forests and their inhabitants.



Brown snake in Cooloola (photo K. Johnson).



The lawyer vine has many fine, recurved hooks.



Exploring the Cooloola wilderness by canoe (photo B Thomas).