

CHAPTER 10 AN ACT FOR WILDLIFE – THE 1960s

*‘Emphasis on the national park as the paramount aim of conservation
would be calamitous.’*

Allen Strom, February 1968

The Stead era closed with David Stead’s death in 1957 and the momentum of those early active years seemed to disappear as the Society moved into the 1960s. The report for 1964, above the signatures of J. M. Bennett (President) and T. Y. Stead (Honorary Editor) sounded an ominous note. Some extracts from that report read:

‘The Society cannot look with much pride on the year's achievements. While it is true that much work has been done and many things accomplished, they have almost entirely failed to sell the Society's principles to the community. The Society has a duty to the public, particularly at the level of education, which simply is not being fulfilled.

‘Almost twelve months ago attempts were made to set up an Education Committee to get our message across to schools and young people. Not a single member of the Society was prepared to organise the Committee which has consequently not yet been convened ...

‘Our approach to juvenile education so far has been much like harvesting ten thousand acres of grain with a pen knife ...

‘Adult education is not seriously undertaken by the Society. ... Our public relations are not strong enough ... In summary, this Society cannot rest until it has helped to promote an attitude in the public mind which accepts wildlife preservation as just as much part of daily life as driving on the left side of the road.

‘To do this we must refurbish our rather faded public image and give Australia the idea that we are doing something ...’.

It was time for a new broom, a new era and this was ushered in by the arrival in Sydney of Vincent Serventy from Western Australia. In 1965 the Society was truly in the doldrums. Thistle was Honorary Secretary and Editor of the magazine. She had changed since the death of David Stead, and in her relationships with other people she was likely to be quick-tempered and at times even disagreeable. Two earnest people on the Council of the Society, Jim and Mabel Brown, invited Vincent Serventy and his wife Carol to dinner one evening and shared with him their misgivings about the state of the Society, particularly the fact that Thistle’s often abusive manner was driving Council members away. Jim Brown asked Vincent to stand for President and he agreed. Mr. J. M. Bennett resigned in July 1966 and Vincent Serventy became President, a position he held until 2002.

Vincent was determined to keep the respect and affection of the Council. Whenever he felt there was major disagreement with anything he proposed, he dropped it. Being

a pragmatist, Vincent always tried to avoid making enemies, knowing the time could come when they would become friends.

The Serventy era had arrived. Part of his success on the east coast was that Allen Keast, an early friend and a noted naturalist, had gone to Canada. Jock Marshall, another noted naturalist, was in Victoria, and the naturalist Crosbie Morrison had died, so Vincent stepped into a vacuum. He was the new voice of conservation, ready to help create a new majority in the public. His was also the voice of reason, always seeking consensus and, if that was not possible, accepting the best compromise so something could be gained. The Wild Life Preservation Society of Australia was ready for a breath of fresh air.

WIRRIMBIRRA

Before Vincent Serventy took the position of President in 1966, Wurrimbirra Sanctuary at Bargo, south of Sydney in New South Wales, was established as a memorial to David George Stead. However, it is also a memorial to Thistle Stead, who worked tirelessly in her later life to make the Sanctuary a worthy contribution to research and education on behalf of the Australian environment. It is also a living memorial to people like Carmen Coleman who conceived the original idea and to the rangers who laboured there in drought and fire, and to the many volunteers, too many to be named, who over the years made the Sanctuary a place of beauty and utility.

In 1958, after David Stead's death in August 1957, the Wild Life Preservation Society established the David George Stead Memorial Fund, to be used, according to the response of subscribers, for one or more of the following purposes:

1. A scholarship or some annual assistance for work in fields that would benefit Nature Preservation or allied subjects.
2. An annual grant for some essay competition or a special piece of research in the fields indicated in 1. above.
3. An annual lecture by one of the Learned Societies.
4. A plaque to his memory in some reserve or in the rooms of some suitable society.¹

Circumstance decreed that the property now known as Wurrimbirra would be acquired in 1962 and, with Stead family agreement, this became David Stead's memorial; finances from the David George Stead Memorial Fund were diverted to this project.

Carmen Coleman, a Sydney accountant and member of the Wild Life Preservation Society, discovered, after a long search, an area that she considered suitable for the establishment of a conservation centre where concerned environmentalists could meet, discuss and implement activities to involve others in environmental conservation. She searched for several years on weekends before finding a suitable bushland area within easy reach of several highly populated centres. The site was portion 32, Parish of Bargo, 66 acres (26 hectares) on the old Hume Highway between Tahmoor and Bargo.² She paid a deposit of £200 (which she had to borrow) and took

¹ *Australian Wild Life* Vol. 3, No. 3, March 1958, p. 7

² Unpublished notes by T. Stead

out a mortgage, dated 19 July 1962, to Alfred John Harry of Epping.³ Carmen was registered as the proprietor of the land, but she soon captured the interest of Thistle in the project. Thistle paid the full price still owing, the mortgage being discharged in January 1963. Thus, in 1963, under Carmen's guidance, the Articles of Association for the David G. Stead Memorial Wildlife Research Foundation of Australia (Incorporated) were drawn up and the name Wurrimbirra (dialect of a Goulburn Aboriginal tribe meaning 'to preserve') was given to the area. This Foundation became the registered proprietor of the land in August 1964.

Carmen Coleman worked out the first development plan for the area, including the planning and erection of the first building (the office) and the siting for the ranger's cottage. She also worked out the first landscape master plan and the overall plan for the use of the area as an educational and research centre. In a six acre block of Wurrimbirra Gardens, architect Milo Dunphy and landscape gardeners John Temple and Ken Harris spent a long day in mid 1964 mapping and measuring the area for the purpose of designing a landscape plan to modify the original one designed by Carmen Coleman.

Thistle held concerns from the outset about the future security of this memorial to David Stead. Therefore, on the urging of the Foundation and especially the lobbying of Thistle Stead, The National Trust of Australia (New South Wales) agreed to accept Wurrimbirra Sanctuary, without payment, as one of its properties. The Trust President at the time was The Honourable Mr. Justice J. McClemens. The transfer would not affect the independence of the Foundation which would remain a separate corporate body registered under the Companies Act.

In 1965 Mr. Mel Fackender became the first ranger and by March 1966 he was in residence in a cottage built by local man Colin Miller. A Field Studies Centre, erected with financial help from the Gould League, was opened on 26 September 1971. Thistle threw herself into the enterprise, although she had frequent disagreements with Mel Fackender, Colin Miller and Allen Strom (President of the Wurrimbirra Board). A native plant nursery was set up as early as 1967, but droughts and frosts took their toll. Help from volunteers was crucial and Stead family members such as Ivy and Kel Stead and their son John, who looked after financial matters, were very supportive.

In April 1973 Keith Armstrong, appointed by the Department of Education, took up his position as teacher at the Field Studies Centre. Keith was not all that impressed with the Wurrimbirra site. 'The one hundred hectares was pretty terrible sandstone scrub with a few hanging swamps and a moist gully through it.'

Vincent Serventy too expressed the opinion that 'it was a terrible piece of land; there was much better land closer to Sydney'.

From early days a newsletter was issued, *Wildlife Research News*, with a succession of volunteer editors; a residential block was set up for the Field Studies Centre; the Allen Strom Demonstration Area was established close to the classroom in 1972. Mel Fackender left after ten years and others took his place in the years which followed. Financial matters were a concern for Thistle and in the early seventies she sold the

³ Land Titles Office

block of land adjoining her house at Watson's Bay. The property left to Thistle by David Stead consisted of two blocks of land, each with their own titles. One of the blocks of land was sold, with payments being made over a period of time to enable Thistle to make regular donations to Wirrimbirra. It was financial concern that moved Thistle, in early 1976, to attempt to shut down the Wild Life Preservation Society in order to transfer its funds to the Stead Foundation. As mentioned in Chapter 8, this move failed.

Wirrimbirra continues today, under the Chair of Janine Kitson, as an important environmental education and field studies centre.

When Thistle Stead passed away on 5 July 1990, *Wildlife Research News*, September 1990, issued tributes from four long-time friends. One paragraph in the tribute written by Bill Hicks is a succinct summary of Thistle's relationship to Wirrimbirra:

'The Stead Foundation and Wirrimbirra Sanctuary will not only perpetuate the memory of David Stead but will be a continuing memorial to Thistle Stead because it exists today not only as a result of her original initiative but through her continuing drive and generous financial support over many years.'

WORLD CONSERVATION DAY

Vincent Serventy wrote in his autobiography (1999):

'I am proud of inaugurating the world's first Conservation Day. Arbor Day and Bird Day were both celebrated in Australia and I thought it was time we had a celebration for the earth during which people would learn of the importance of conservation of the total environment. In August 1964, I wrote to the Director of Education (Western Australia).'

Vincent put forward his idea of setting aside a whole day as a Conservation Day in schools. By holding this day in the springtime, he suggested, benefit would ensue by seeing gardens and bush at their best and would allow for good weather for outdoor celebrations.

'We held our first Conservation Day at a local metropolitan school two months later. Thousands of children took part in Kings Park in one huge celebration when we inaugurated a nature trail, but in the years that followed interest flickered. Six years later the United States held its first Earth Day. They too chose springtime ... Later, in 1972, when 113 nations met at Stockholm to discuss the needs of the human environment, they too decided to inaugurate an earth day – World Environment Day. They chose 5 June, midsummer in the north, midwinter in the south. So World Environment Day limps along, never quite catching public imagination but funded by governments so tonnes of paper are used for promotion.'

NATIONAL PARKS AND WILDLIFE ACT (1967)

This Act was a milestone in conservation in New South Wales. The Society had lobbied the New South Wales Government for many years and made a significant contribution by its submissions and letters during the critical formative period. In 1967, President Serventy was appointed to the Advisory Council, official recognition of the place of the Society in the conservation scene. This position he kept for about eight years when he resigned due to pressure from other commitments, having felt, nevertheless, that he had achieved what he wanted to achieve in that quarter.

Under the National Parks and Wildlife Act, the Fauna Panel and the office of Chief Guardian of Fauna were to be abolished and fauna reserves became nature reserves. Both the Fauna Protection Act and the Wild Flowers and Native Plants Protection Act came under the new administration. Not everyone was in favour of wildlife coming under the wing of the National Parks and Wildlife Service, but the Society's Secretary wrote to the Premier of New South Wales in July 1966 to express appreciation of the Government's intention to bring parks and wildlife under single ministerial control, but also expressed some concern:

'... this Society voices the respectful hope that the scientific side of this administration will not be neglected. The creation of nature reserves is disproportionately outstripped by reservations for parks which, though commendable, cater more for recreation than for the calculated husbanding of natural environments and wildlife. To this end the establishment of some form of Nature Conservancy or Commission by which the scientific and recreational interests might be synchronised would, in our view, be a most valuable measure.'

Allen Strom, Chief Guardian of Fauna up to this time, supported this view in his address to the Society's Annual Meeting in February 1968, saying:

'It would be a sad day for nature conservation if we were prepared to accept an increasing acreage of national parks as a satisfactory achievement. ... By the nature of the new moves the wildlife conservation program has suffered a setback which could be catastrophic. I do not see the Service (The National Parks and Wildlife Service) becoming much more than a public service agency for handing down agreeable picnic-type usage of parks and law-interpreted protection for wild life ... The administration must be disentangled from Ministerial dominance.'⁴

KOSCIUSKO⁵

It was surely Thistle Stead's love and concern for the alpine areas which occasioned the interest of the Society in this area for many years. Since her first visit to Kosciusko as a university student in 1923, Thistle had been both fascinated and concerned about the fate of the relatively small alpine areas in Australia. From sometime in the 1930s she began her yearly summer pilgrimage to Kosciusko to study the flowers, usually in the company of family or friends. When 1.3 million acres of crown land were set aside as the Kosciusko State Park in 1944, under the management

⁴ Reported in the *Daily Telegraph*, 28 February 1968, p. 18

⁵ For the purposes of this account of the Society's dealings with the area I shall use the spelling KOSCIUSKO, that was common usage throughout the time of its greatest involvement

of a Trust, hopes were raised that this would result in effective protection for the unrivalled alpine flora and its concomitant fauna.

It was the uncontrolled grazing of sheep and cattle over a period in excess of 100 years that led to expressions of concern to the Government that ultimately led to the establishment of Kosciusko State Park. The practice of grazing in the high country commenced some 160 years ago, and it was not until the 1890s that some measure of control was introduced when the area was subdivided into snow leases and permissive occupancies. But grazing continued with little supervision until the 1930s, when Mr. E. S. Clayton (then an officer of the Department of Agriculture) became concerned that soil was being blown and washed away, and land eroded because of bad usage. In 1942 Clayton approached the NSW Premier, Hon. W. J. McKell, (later Sir William) and asked him to accompany him on a tour of inspection of the region. This the Premier agreed to do and his dismay and concern at what he saw led to the Kosciusko State Park Act in 1944. The year 1949 saw the passage of legislation to proceed with the Snowy Mountains Hydro-Electric Scheme and this brought more problems for the Kosciusko State Park Trust. Grazing above 4,500 feet ceased as from May 1958, but continued in other parts of the Park until the passing of the National Parks and Wildlife Act in 1967. In 1969 a decision was made to phase out all grazing in the Park.⁶

The Wild Life Preservation Society of Australia took a keen interest in the conservation of the alpine areas, kept up to date with conditions there by Thistle as she visited each summer. David Stead, in his capacity as acting Honorary Secretary and Honorary Editor of the Society, wrote an article for *Australian Wild Life* in June 1946, saying:

'The recent establishment of the Kosciusko State Park, by the NSW Government, is far-and-away the most important move in wild life and native flora conservation and protection that has ever been made in Australia ... (however) it is not at all clear from the wording of the Act of Parliament itself (Act No. 14, 1944) that this fauna and flora conservation is to be the first consideration in the future administration of the Park, whatever may be the intentions of the Kosciusko State Park Trust at the outset.

'From the moment the Kosciusko State Park Act was passed it has been made abundantly clear in Press comments and the statements of several parliamentary representatives and some Ministers of the Crown - not to mention the sports interests - that this Park must be "developed" as one vast "playground".'

The article went on to say that, as a conservation Society, the W.L.P.S.A. was not against the use of parts of the Park for alpine or other sports. But Stead pointed out that, under the Act, the Park Trust was limited in its disposition of the lands under its charge to a total not exceeding one tenth of the total as a "primitive" area. David Stead had written to the Park Trust on 6 March 1945 urging it to make a general survey of the area before any decision was made regarding the provision of wild life and flora sanctuaries within the Park. He emphasised that from his personal knowledge of the

⁶ Information from H. Stanley, *A History of the Establishment of Kosciusko National Park*, NPWS, n.d.

alpine areas it would be quite impossible to get one self-contained sanctuary to embrace the faunal and floral features; he offered the opinion that there would need to be at least half-a-dozen separate major sanctuaries, with a number of others of smaller size preserved for some special floral features ... The suggestion for one primitive area should not be entertained for a moment.⁷

During her visit to Kosciusko in February 1955, Thistle had several discussions with members of the Scientific Services Division of the Snowy Mountains Authority regarding reclamation work in the area. On her return to Sydney she sent a letter, as Secretary of the Society, to the Commissioner, Mr. Hudson (later Sir William Hudson) congratulating the Authority on the roadside reclamation work being undertaken in many sections. But in the same letter she drew attention to signs of the use of bulldozers on the Blue Lake track - on the descent from Charlotte's Pass to the Snowy River - and along the track on the ridge above Seaman's Hut, causing serious erosion.

In spite of assurances from the Snowy Mountains Authority, the Wild Life Preservation Society was still expressing concern in March 1956 about erosion in the snow areas accelerated by excessive grazing and engineering works. As Secretary, Thistle reported in the journal, 'Many interests are now concerned in protecting the area and your Society continues to press for the withdrawal of all grazing leases at the higher altitudes, for the greatest possible care to reduce damage due to engineering projects to a minimum, and for reclamation work to be carried out on areas already damaged.'⁸

The Kosciusko State Park Act 1944 provided, *inter alia*, for the Trust to establish a 'Primitive Area' of ten percent of the Park's area, but nothing was done about this until a group from the Australian Academy of Science decided to stir things up. In 1958 they set up a special committee to produce a proposal for a primitive area. In 1962 the Wild Life Preservation Society noted with satisfaction the publication of a brochure by the Academy of Science entitled *The Future of the Kosciusko Summit Area: A Report on a Proposed Primitive Area in the Kosciusko State Park*. The Society's journal pointed out that the Society had been represented among the naturalists who, together with the Academy's scientists, had made the submission in 1958. The 1962 Report proposed an area of seventy square miles which included sites ranging in altitude from 1,500 feet to 7,300 feet and covered within this comparatively small area alpine and sub-alpine sections a wider range of vegetation than could be found anywhere else in Australia.

Since the original submission about the primitive area in 1958, Thistle Stead had been actively lobbying on behalf of the Wild Life Preservation Society. One example is the following, as reported in *Australian Wild Life* for June 1960. 'Your Secretary (T. Y. Stead) has just returned from an interesting tour of alpine areas, including sections of the Kosciusko State Park. As a result of discussions with the botanists of the Snowy Mountains Authority, the newly-appointed Superintendent of the Park (Mr. N. C. Gare) and other persons, the following suggestions have been sent to the Chairman of Trustees, Kosciusko State Park:

⁷ *Australian Wild Life*, June 1946, p.12-13

⁸ *ibid*, March 1956, p.5

'Because of its increased importance and because of the increased and increasing tourist traffic in the area, may I urge the Trustees to give further consideration to the proposal put before them some time ago by Conservation Bodies (including the Academy of Science and this Society) for the setting aside of a NATURAL or PRIMITIVE AREA within the Park proper, for the purpose of preserving a section of the unique flora of the alpine area. This spring the flowers were magnificent, but the number of tourists stopping at points of interest and trampling and picking flowers has to be seen to be believed. For immediate consideration I would suggest that the following steps be taken to safeguard the area.'

(Here followed suggestions about erection of notices, removal of obsolete and decaying buildings, attention to the rubbish tip at the Chalet, and the need for a publication on the natural history of the Park.)⁹

Another letter was sent by Thistle on behalf of the Society early in 1961 to Sir William Hudson, Commissioner, Snowy Mountains Hydro-Electric Authority. She mentioned a remnant of the old Spencer's Creek hut that should be removed, and the need to implement erosion controls in some areas, particularly in the valley below the Albina Track.¹⁰

No doubt as a result of the lobbying by the Australian Academy of Science and other interested bodies, including the Wild Life Preservation Society, the Kosciusko State Park Trust in January 1963 declared a Primitive Area of approximately seventy square miles in the vicinity of Mount Kosciusko.

Mr. Howard Stanley spoke on behalf of the Park Trust to the meeting of the Society on 17 June 1963, thanking the Society for its support of the Kosciusko State Park Trust in its attempts to have the newly declared wilderness area kept free of engineering works proposed by the Snowy Mountains Authority. In December 1963 Thistle wrote in *Australian Wild Life*:

'A semblance of peace has settled on the controversy outlined in earlier issues between the Kosciusko State Park Trust and the Snowy Mountains Hydro-Electric Authority over large-scale earth and engineering works proposed within the Kosciusko primitive area. At such a time we should be on our guard lest the very emphatic stand taken by conservationists be weakened by the simple passage of time.'

But the Primitive Area survived and today, in the 21st century, is incorporated in the current Kosciusko Plan of Management as part of Management Area A1 for management of outstanding natural alpine and subalpine resources. Much of it is of course subject to heavy use in summer by visitors on foot beyond Charlotte's Pass and from the Thredbo Chairlift, so the area is still under great pressure.

Late in 1965, the Kosciusko State Park Trust made available a 'Proposed Plan for the Preservation and Development of the Kosciusko State Park' and invited comment. The President of the Society, Mr. J. M. Bennett, thoroughly studied the plan and made some pertinent suggestions on several items. The comments by the Society addressed

⁹ *Australian Wild Life*, June 1960, p.4-5

¹⁰ *ibid*

such matters as conservation of scientific and wilderness values, the complete exclusion of grazing, opposition to construction of walking tracks and signs within the scientific areas, opposition to the construction of roads and fire trails in wilderness areas, and problems of rehabilitation in areas damaged by the hydro-electric scheme.

With the passing of the National Parks and Wildlife Act in 1967, Kosciusko became a National Park, but it was not until 1969 that all grazing within the boundaries of the Park ceased. However, illegal cattle were still in the high country in the early seventies until the National Parks and Wildlife Service found effective means to deal with the problem.

Many years after the days of botanising and lobbying, Thistle wrote to Neville Gare, then Deputy Director of the Australian National Parks and Wildlife Service. She said:

It was nice to have a letter from you and I am grateful for the publications you sent which will be helpful. I am glad you speak so highly of Kosciusko and the state of its flora at present. Last time I was there I stayed at Perisher and while there were still plenty of lovely places to walk in I felt the old friendly atmosphere had given place to a new sophistication and a division of the population into two distinct categories. I don't really want to see it again.¹¹

It was 1985 and Thistle Stead was 83 years old. Once again it was the end of an era.

DEE WHY LAGOON

It is impossible to recount in full the commitment of the Society over the years to support worthy causes initiated by other conservation bodies, but one long-standing battle to which the Society made a major contribution, beyond writing letters of concern, was that of the Dee Why Lagoon, on the coast just north of Sydney in New South Wales. In 1936, just after Warringah Shire Council had acquired the low-lying land around the Lagoon, the Society took action, together with the Parks and Playgrounds Movement and other bodies to obtain the permanent reservation of this area. The Shire Council announced that it intended to restore, as far as possible, the native flora of the area and to do everything possible to protect and retain the wild stock of black swans which perennially made their home there.

'We trust that the Shire Council, whose charge this interesting spot has now come into permanently, will not yield to any suggestions as to putting in the type of "improvements" which will make of it "just another park." There has been some fear of this recently, but we have the Shire Council's assurance in the meantime that this will not be done.'¹²

The land surrounding Dee Why Lagoon was originally owned by the Salvation Army, who sold it to Warringah Shire Council in 1934 under the covenant that it be used for public recreation. In 1909 there had been a court case which declared that the Salvation Army was not the owner of the water, that is, the lagoon, but it was the owner of the adjoining land. At the time the Warringah Council acquired the land it was a very swampy area, not worth much, and this, together with the covenant placed on it, saved it from development.

¹¹ Letter supplied by N. Gare, 17 March 1997

¹² *Australian Wild Life*, January 1937, p. 15

The Sydney Morning Herald of 26 October 1959 published an article on Dee Why Lagoon entitled, *Dee Why Lagoon - Birds or Bulldozers?* The article read in part:

'The struggle over the future of the lagoon area (which the Council bought from the Salvation Army) has continued, on and off, for more than twenty years - it is to become a golf course, it is to be dredged for rutilite, there are to be islands in the lake. Men have been trying persistently to stamp their construction into the delicate ecology of the area; others have been resisting it strenuously.'

This publicity in the *Sydney Morning Herald* was the result of an interview with one of the Society's Vice-Presidents, Mr. J. Gordon McKern. The article caused a spate of letters to the *Herald* protesting against the Council proposals. The Society asked the Warringah Council to receive a deputation to hear its case, but was refused an interview. A Warringah Council officer was reported in the Press (2 November 1959) as saying:

'The ultimate idea will be to dredge the lagoon and reclaim. That may be in many years' time, but it's the ultimate thing to do. A properly planned garden suburb is better than a tract of filthy bushland.'

Ivor Wyatt of the National Trust of Australia (NSW) said:

'Conservation authorities have been trying for many years to improve the protection of birds in the area - its value as a migratory resting place is beyond dispute.'

Allen Strom, as Chief Guardian of Fauna, said:

'Why not make it the Dee Why Wildlife Refuge - the first in the State - jointly administered by the Council and the Fauna Protection Panel?'

The Cumberland County Council rejected a plea by conservation organisations to block development by having the area proclaimed one of scientific interest. This seemed a curious decision given that the Lagoon was the only home of the black swan in the County of Cumberland; sixty-one recorded species of birds used it as a migratory stop or for nesting and it was the habitat for a collection of sandstone swamp flowers unique in the Sydney area.

In August 1965 Warringah Shire Council announced its plans to use the Dee Why sand dunes for the disposal of garbage, an area between the sea and the lagoon. Swift and angry protests followed from residents and conservation bodies, including the Society. At a later meeting the decision was rescinded by Council.

In 1966-67, a Census was taken of the natural resources of the Dee Why Lagoon area, compiled by the Wild Life Preservation Society at the request of Warringah Shire Council. In the following year, 1968, Warringah Council decided a bowling green would be built on what is now the Refuge and this led to a court case in which the Society presented its evidence in support of the preservation of the wild life.

Australian Wild Life reported in June 1969:

'The future of the Lagoon is still undecided, but the Society has kept in close touch with the efforts of the Dee Why Lagoon Conservation and Development Committee through Mr. F. Vanry, our representative.'

However, in January 1970 the Warringah Shire Council decided to accept the detailed development plan submitted by a group of landscape design students at the University of New South Wales (Stead, Baggs and Smith). Thistle Stead had undertaken this course as a mature age student to expand her interest in horticulture and landscape design. The Council asked the Dee Why Committee whether its members would be interested in helping with the implementation of this plan, perhaps in supervision of or participation in physical work. The Society sent congratulations to the Warringah Shire Council on its decision to implement the students' plan. Mr. F. Vanry continued to represent the Society on the Dee Why Lagoon Conservation and Development Committee.

The petitions and determined appeals by the local community and interested conservation groups finally bore fruit; in the *NSW Government Gazette* Number 28, 2 March 1973, a Proclamation under Section 23A of the Fauna Protection Act, 1948, read:

'County Cumberland, Parish Manly Cove, about 142 hectares, being Lot 2, Deposited Plan No. 233606, and the bed of Dee Why Lagoon, shown in plan catalogued Ms 7481 in the Department of Lands, exclusive of public roads. To be known as Dee Why Lagoon Wildlife Refuge No. 373.'

Thus Dee Why Lagoon Wildlife Refuge came into being, to include the sand dunes, adjoining bushland and the bed of the Lagoon, but not the water itself. However, in terms of management, it is impossible to separate the water habitat from the adjoining land and both water and land are treated as a whole. After gazettal, there was a draft plan of management for the Refuge prepared by the National Parks and Wildlife Service.

In the late 1990s, Dee Why Lagoon was under the control of the Natural and Built Environment Services within Warringah Council. The Dee Why and Curl Curl Estuary Management Committee looked after the Lagoon proper, while a bushland section looked after the wildlife refuge. As intimated above, there is considerable overlap and consultation. A Dee Why Wildlife Refuge Plan of Management was approved in 1991, but it was updated, with plans for release in April 1998. The Estuary Management Committee was making an Estuary Processes Study in 1998, together with a Management Study.

By the close of 2008, the Council was working off a 2002 update for the Refuge Management Plan and the Estuary Management Plan, dated May 2000, was the latest working plan for the lagoon area.

On 24 June 1997 the Dee Why Lagoon Wildlife Refuge was placed on the Register of the National Estate. The Australian Heritage Commission Statement of Significance in its report of June 1997 read:

'Dee Why Lagoon is one of the best examples, in the Sydney Region, of an estuarine lagoon. It is one of the few large estuarine barrier lagoons remaining in a good condition, in the Sydney Region. The saltmarsh of the lagoon area is

a regionally uncommon remnant of saline marshlands, which were formerly more widespread in the Sydney Region. The diversity of saltmarsh plants found at Dee Why Lagoon is high in comparison to other saltmarsh communities in the region. Dee Why Lagoon is also an important site for teaching and research associated with biological zonation, estuarine barrier lagoons and estuarine wetlands.'

Thus a cause in which the Society was able to lend its voice and its expertise resulted in the preservation of a natural area within earshot of urban development and, supported by the environmental awareness which developed in the late twentieth century, we can feel confident it will be held sacred for future generations.

WYRRABALONG NATIONAL PARK

In 1967 a battle was being fought by the North Entrance Peninsula Preservation Society (NEPPS) on the Central Coast of New South Wales to preserve as much as possible of the littoral rainforest between North Entrance and Toukley from rutile mining. The area was also forested with Sydney red gum, *Angophora costata*. The President, Lois Sourry, invited Vincent Serventy and Thistle Stead to visit the area and talk to the Society. Three hundred people attended a meeting beneath a huge Sydney red gum on 28 June 1967. Vin and Thistle spoke on conservation as representatives of the Wild Life Preservation Society. They appealed for everyone's support in 'a combined effort to determine future land usage in this State, that due regard may be had for the maintenance of recreation areas and wildlife sanctuaries.' The rutile companies were compelled by law to take steps to restore the vegetation. Thistle warned, 'Don't be fooled by their statements that they can put things back as good as or even better than they found them'.

The campaign was successful because the area in question was not subjected to mining, which was restricted to the ocean side. This area of significant littoral rainforest and red gum forest has since become part of Wyrabalong National Park, which was proclaimed in 1991.

LAKE PEDDER

It was in April 1965 that proposals for the flooding of Lake Pedder in Tasmania had been outlined by the Premier, Eric Reece. Road works were already well advanced and obviously following some definite plan. Thistle Stead, working on a book about alpine flora in the 1960s, decided to visit Tasmania to study the alpine vegetation of its high regions. Thistle set off in December 1964 with a friend, driving her own car to Melbourne and across Bass Strait in the ferry, a tour of ten weeks. In January they made an unforgettable trip to Lake Pedder, by plane, a small Cessna:

'Landing on the quartzite beach we found ourselves on the margin of the shallow glacial lake, its brownish buttongrass-coloured waters lapping gently along a completely deserted shore with Mount Anne rising serenely behind, Mount Solitary only partly visible through a low cloud ... As we saw the Lake and its encircling mountains in their various moods, we came to understand

the walker's love for this place.'¹³

In March 1967, the Save Lake Pedder National Park Committee was formed, but by May the Middle Gordon scheme had been tabled in Parliament and the details made public. Thistle Stead in Sydney was mobilised for the Lake Pedder emergency. She rang various people in Sydney, sent a telegram to the Premier of Tasmania and wrote a long letter to the Editor of *The Australian* entitled "Save Lake Pedder", under the banner of the Wild Life Preservation Society. It was about mid-June 1967 that Thistle and President Vincent Serventy decided to go to Tasmania to lend their support to the 'Save Lake Pedder' campaign, certain that news of mainlanders going down to Tasmania for this purpose would make a more dramatic strike for publicity than anything else so far.

Thistle wrote to her friend in Tasmania, Kay Geeves, who was a member of the South-west Committee, a non-government body of conservation-conscious representatives of various walking clubs and associations. Their main concern at this time being the threat to the Gordon River and Lake Pedder:

'Vin could put on a first rate show with excellent slides and films, which would be first rate publicity as well as money making. We would both be happy to talk in Hobart and Launceston and Devonport if it could be arranged in the time. I think I could give good material on the unique botanical features of Pedder ...'

In the same letter Thistle extolled the virtues of Vincent Serventy, no doubt to reassure Kay and her supporters that organising public meetings for both Vin and herself would not be a fruitless exercise:

'I should have added that although Vin has not visited Pedder he knows other parts of Tasmania well and has a good general knowledge of National Parks and the National Park concept, is a most convincing speaker, unemotional and enthusiastic, and with a personality that seems to attract everybody. As the author of *A Continent in Danger* he has prestige in this field.'¹⁴

Both Thistle and Vincent gave evidence at a Parliamentary enquiry - a Select Committee had been set up by the Legislative Council to receive evidence concerning the Gordon scheme. Before the enquiry, however, Kay Geeves, Alan Gray (another supporter), Ron Brown MLC (chairperson of the South-west Committee), Thistle and Vin flew in a light plane over Lake Pedder.

In August 1967, the Select Committee Report, approving the Gordon scheme, was tabled, but it did recommend that a new National Park be declared and that there should be an investigation into the flora and fauna of the area to be flooded. The wild life survey was carried out and the South-west National Park formulated in 1968, but some areas of the south-west were excluded.

The 'Lake Pedder Action Committee' (L.P.A.C.) was formed in March 1971, but Premier Bethune bluntly refused any reconsideration of the issues at stake, despite changing environmental attitudes and failing industrial attractions. Interest increased on the mainland with L.P.A.C. groups forming. In March 1972 the Liberal

¹³ T.Y. Stead, 'Island of Enchantment', *Australian Wild Life*, June 1965

¹⁴ Letter from T. Stead to K. Geeves, 21 June 1967

Government collapsed and Labor came to power, but conservationists lost the legal challenge. The battle had been lost. Even though the Federal Labor Government offered the funds to build a pipeline to bypass the Lake, the State Labor Government refused and so in 1975 Lake Pedder was flooded. But a new awareness by the public about the value of the south-west area had developed.

In 1983 South-west Tasmania was declared a World Heritage area. This time it was a different story when the Government proposed the Gordon below Franklin Dam in 1979. In 1984 the High Court of Australia ruled that this Dam was in breach of World Heritage values. Hon. R. J. (Bob) Hawke MP (Labor) had promised that if elected to Federal Government in 1983, he would save the Franklin. The Society worked to help raise money to contribute towards the fight. Vin went to Perth to raise money and also spoke at a large outdoor rally in Sydney. In December 1982, the dam site was occupied by protesters, leading to widespread arrests and greater publicity. The dispute became a federal issue the following March, when a campaign in the national print media helped bring down the government of Malcolm Fraser at the 1983 election. Over the five years between the announcement of the dam proposal in 1978 and the axing of the plans in 1983, there was vigorous debate between the pro and anti-dam lobbies, with large protests from both sides. A legal battle between the federal government and Tasmanian state government followed, resulting in a landmark High Court ruling in the federal government's favour.

THE GREAT BARRIER REEF

In 1967 a call for help came from its Innisfail branch to the Wild Life Preservation Society of Queensland. There was an application to mine Ellison Reef for lime to be used in agriculture. Conservationists had been aware of damages to the Great Barrier Reef from oil drilling and from oil spills from tankers that threaded a risky route along the inner channel, but this was a new way of using the vast resources of the Reef. The Innisfail Branch lodged an objection with the Mining Warden's Court. So did the newly formed Littoral Society. The Australian Conservation Foundation, also newly formed, lodged an objection as well.

'Little did we realise we had caught a tiger by the tail and a battle that would rage for fourteen years and stretch our resources to the limit was just beginning,' said Vincent Serventy. It was one of the crucial environmental struggles in Australia's history and Judith Wright, poet and environmentalist, told the full story in her book *The Coral Battleground*, published in 1977.

The application to mine Ellison Reef was the chance to open the battle lines. It had not been possible to challenge applications to drill for oil as the State Government had left no legal room for objection, but mining was different. In this, a Warden's Court would hear the objections. The local Innisfail group searched for experts. Who better than the Great Barrier Reef Committee based at the University of Queensland? A letter to the University received this reply: 'It appears that the portion of the Reef known as Ellison Reef is dead.' However, with support from other experts, the result was favourable: the Mining Warden recommended against the mining of Ellison.

At the time a maze of regulations, both State and Federal, gave protection to the whole Reef – in theory. In 1968 the *Continental Shelf Act* gave the Federal Government legal powers over the living natural resources on the Reef. This was a powerful beginning, although as Judith Wright wrote, there was no Act to protect the region as a whole and no organisation to protect the area as its province.

A new enemy appeared on the scene. By 1968 the crown-of-thorns seastar, eating its way through the coral, was big news to be added to concern about mining and oil drilling. So far the general public had seen the battle for the Reef as mainly a Queensland affair. Judith Wright decided to make it a national and, she hoped, an international issue. She went south to Sydney and stayed in the Serventy house in Hunters Hill while they planned a publicity campaign together. Then, a powerful friend joined the cause. On 21 January 1970 the Queensland Trades and Labour Council approved a total black ban on all drilling on the Reef.

The Federal Whitlam Government, elected in 1972, supported the Wallace Royal Commission, which recommended in November 1974 that oil-drilling should be prohibited on the Great Barrier Reef but could be allowed fifteen miles out to sea. The Wild Life Preservation Society was strongly urging that the whole province of the Great Barrier Reef should be a National Park.

With World Heritage Listing in 1981 the Reef was safe at last and the long battle over. The Great Barrier Reef Marine Park put a conservation umbrella over the region even though the Queensland Premier, Hon. Joh Bjelke-Petersen, fought tooth and nail against every sensible change.

In 2003 the Society could not believe that only 4.6% of the reef was highly protected. The Reef was still under threat – numerous inshore reefs were dying and the numbers of many fish species were declining. The Reef was threatened by over fishing and seafloor trawling, coral bleaching caused by climate change and pollution run-off from the land.

A coalition was formed by concerned environmental groups, including the Wildlife Preservation Society, to ensure the protection of the Great Barrier Reef for future generations by increasing the protected zones and marine sanctuaries. The coalition agreed to lobby for fifty percent total protection, but finally accepted a compromise of thirty-three percent protection.

Vincent Serventy and Patrick Medway wrote in the book *Conservation Victories*:

‘The Federal Government’s new internationally acclaimed protection regime for the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park came into force on 1 July 2004. A plan providing the highest possible level of protection for one-third of the entire GBRMP passed through the Commonwealth parliament with bipartisan support. This is an historic moment for the Great Barrier Reef and for Australia Our Society joined with other conservation groups, including WWF, to lobby for the Green Zone to be increased to at least fifty percent of total protection.’

SIXTY YEARS OF THE W.L.P.S.A.

Thistle Stead gave an address at a function commemorating the sixtieth anniversary of the Wild Life Preservation Society of Australia, held in St James' Hall, Phillip Street, Sydney, on 4 December 1969. In her concluding remarks she said:

‘It has been a stormy passage, and the fight is not yet won. A short time ago, the present Minister for Lands, the Hon. T. L. Lewis, commented to me that the conservationists of earlier years had not made the attacks on governments which present conservationists were making. I referred him to the records of the Society through the years; there is no report in the whole of our sixty years of existence in which governments were not criticised for their apathy in conservation matters, or urged to take steps to improve the situation. It is only that the matter has become increasingly urgent, and this is apparent in our records ...’