

ESQUADRA N.º 9





EDITORIAL:

Your editor is now 6 months ahead on promises and about 3 months late with Mobsac. No apologies, but it would have been nice to have time to devote to the magazine.

The editorial I had proposed to write has now been thrown into the bin to give space to a request on behalf of future Mobsac editors. Most clubs go through a stage of stagnation when the club membership is neither changing rapidly nor are many new members being taken in. This leads to two outcomes -- the club may fold through lack of interest or continue as a very exclusive aggregation of a few diehard members. I'm not suggesting our club is about to fold, but I can say that unless a little more enthusiasm is shown in some of its activities, then it will surely become an exclusive group. In particular, there seems to be a particular dislike amongst our two clubs to get off our backsides and do a little for our magazine. Of course there are about a half dozen people who always seem to end up doing the work, and indeed it is done without griping; things like printing the covers, collating the printed articles and stapling these. But nobody seems to want to do any typing for the Mobsac -- that is of course provided we get some articles in the first place -- and this is the nature of my request.

I WOULD LIKE TO HEAR FROM ANYONE WHO CAN TYPE (even with one finger); we cannot expect the editor to do the large amount of work required in typing the whole show.

I WOULD LIKE TO HEAR FROM ANYONE WHO WILL HELP RUN OFF STENCILS ; again because the editor just cannot be expected to do the whole job.

If you think I'm being unreasonable, tell me. If you think I'm being fair in my request, why not see me and I'll give you a small job on the next Mobsac -- a job I can be sure is not too time-consuming for your available time. I am prepared to edit Mobsacs for the rest of the year but this depends on the team I can get to assist me. My time is fairly limited, but I would rather put a little more time than I would normally into this magazine, because I believe it can be made something extra good (not that it isn't already)

I can be found in the Chancellor's Court most lunchtimes except Fridays.

Alan NUTLEY (Streaker
Extraordinaire)

LOVE ON THE CRAGS -

The growing number of "pairs" now climbing has led to the growth of suitable climbing vernacular for use on the crag. After all "the moon that shines on your face" garbage is just so limiting that only a tourist would stoop to it. We rockclimbers require something more specialised and inspiring on the climb or around the campfire.

So as a preview to our next Rock Opera ---
"Ropebelow and Jumarit"
we present some pointers for the ultimate in clift love:

for the initial move,

"finding you was like finding a jug on a blank wall"

"when I first saw you I floated up Janiceps"

"you belaying me will make hitting the deck easier"
(be careful of the emphasis)

when your on your way,

"finding you was like finding a jug on a blank wall"

"your face is a 2I to me"

"you make me feel so giddy I need a belay on the track"

"I need you as desperately as Mintaur Wall needs protection"

However not all rock romances will be overcome as easily as a Grade 8.
When you really want to be insulting,

"you should use karabiners for earrings"

"go get your hair caught in an absiel"

"don't kid yourself, our loves as solid as 'Fuddy Duddy' "

or

"the bags under your eyes are like a Whillan's sac."

Paul Mara.

HA HA HA HA HA HA HA

Spray your pack with tacky stuff. When the flies land they get stuck.
Then spray with Aerogaurd. The lift supplied by thousands of angry flies
lightens the pack....?....

YUCK.

ON THE WRONG SIDE OF CONSERVATION -

WALKERS AS A DESTRUCTIVE ECOLOGICAL INFLUENCE.

Conservation has always been a contentious issue, almost by definition - if something is to be saved, then almost always it is to be saved from the actions of another group of people, who of course react against any opposition to their proposals. In all the major conservation issues to date, the two sides of the argument have been well defined (Hydro Electric Commission versus Lake Pedder Action Committee, Associated Portland Cement Manufacturers versus Colong Committee, etc). This is because the destruction of our natural resources has in these cases been so blatant, and for the benefit of so few.

In future, however, the conflict is going to change increasingly from an open battle between distinct opposing groups, to a personal conflict within every thinking person. This is because the most important conservation issues of the future will directly be the materials and substances we have come to regard as essential to our way of life. That is, pollution of air and water, depletion of coal, oil, ore and phosphate reserves, destruction of cities to make way for transportation, and so on.

For instance, those who will perhaps agree that oil should be rationed to save for the future, will themselves be adversely affected by any consequent petrol shortages. Any situation containing such an internal conflict would have to be resolved on grounds of pure self interest. How much are we prepared to sacrifice now, perhaps considerably lowering present standards of living, in order that we may maintain some degree of comfort or enjoyment well into the future? To me the answer seems obvious, but political and industrial leaders do not yet seem to be taking any significant action.

To return to a more personally relevant level, it is unlikely that any of us will be able to exert any controlling influence on matters of such global importance. (Of course that is not to say that we should ignore them - our clubs should do everything within reason to assist the various conservation pressure groups.) However the point I would like to make is that there are a number of such internal conflict situations right within the fields of the clubs' activities, and it is here that we have to make our first compromises between the present and future. While hardly of world shattering importance, the wrong decision could result in serious destruction of areas that we will use and gain enjoyment from in future outings.

To get down to it, consider first what is perhaps a trivial example: Rockclimbers have already reached a sensible conclusion about the use of pitons - while they may be far more useful than any other type of equipment in many positions, they have such a destructive effect on the rock that their use is being abandoned in all but a few special cases. Once the widespread destruction was realised, the decision was an obvious one.

Similarly, failure to properly dispose of rubbish can have an extraordinarily detrimental effect on the appearance of an otherwise beautiful campsite, yet despite this simple observation people have for decades persisted in leaving campsites or huts littered with tins and other garbage. If you want your campsite to be pleasant and clean I can only say yet again, "If you can carry it in, you can carry it out." Surely this is relatively painless to put into practice, and is a fair price to pay for clean accommodation.

However the more serious situations are unfortunately less obvious than these. The problem we should become increasingly aware of is this: There are such large numbers of bushwalkers, that their very presence is having a noticeable adverse effect on the more sensitive, heavily visited areas. I refer in particular to the Budawangs, and the Bluegum Forest, although there are doubtless many other areas that are similarly affected.

Bluegum was where the problem first struck me as really significant. For anyone who has not yet visited Bluegum (and who hasn't???) it is roughly 200 m by 400 m, i.e. rectangular, at the junction of Govetts Creek and the Grose River, near Blackheath. The ground is perfectly level, well grassed with no scrub, and shaded by hundreds of Sydney Bluegums which grow to tremendous heights. The creek and river run through the middle. Because of the area's beauty, ideal campsites, and proximity to transport (just the right distance for a very easy overnight trip or a medium day trip) it is visited by hordes of scouts and tourists (relatively speaking). Serious walkers tend to avoid the area in contempt, in spite of the attractions, due to its overuse.

The effects of so many visitors and campers take place so gradually that they are not obvious, but I feel that the cumulative results are such that to say that Bluegum is dying is no exaggeration. Firstly, a quick survey will reveal no young trees, and it appears that the forest is unable to regenerate in the face, or feet, of scores of people trampling over every square inch of ground.

Secondly, the creek and river serve to concentrate people's movements along their banks. It does not take long for a track to form, and to wear down through the grass that binds the surface of the soil together. If the track is within 2 or 3 m of the bank, which is generally an unsupported wall of sand and gravel 2 to 3 m high, a little assistance from the water will cause the bank to collapse into the creek or river bed. In all probability one of the magnificent trees will collapse with it.

A subsidiary effect of this is that steep sided banks never have a chance to revegetate and stabilise, so that the process, if not self-perpetuating, is certainly self-assisting. The watercourses are now 50 m wide, and in places a tangled mess of huge fallen trees. A decade ago, I am told, the river was half its present width, and clear of obstructions.

There is apparently a need to restrict the use of such an unusual and probably unique area. Bushwalkers, serious and occasional, are the only people affected either way by any action, or lack of it, in such a case. It is up to individual walkers to act sensibly, in avoiding obvious and not so obvious destructive behaviour, and for groups, such as our clubs, to press for official restrictions.

The National Parks and Wildlife Service is at present formulating a policy on camping in National Parks in general. If this does not curtail activity in Bluegum, then UNSWBW and/or Federation and/or National Parks Association should begin to move for some specific action. A total ban on camping would probably be regarded as unacceptable, and not very effective as people walking through and picnicing would have just as much effect. Nevertheless, it may be necessary. Rather more drastic would be to fence off most of the area, and the river banks in particular, for a number of years. The net result would probably be the total sacrifice of a small part of Bluegum, but the salvation of the rest which would hopefully be able to regenerate and stabilise more or less undisturbed.

Let us be prepared to lose Bluegum temporarily, in the hope of regaining it all later, and hope that genuinely effective action is taken in the near future.

The other case where weight of numbers is reducing the potential of a region is the Eudawangs. Fortunately the situation here is not as severe as in Bluegun, but is at about the same standard of annoyance as extensive littering (a habit from which walkers usually, are refreshingly free). The combination of very many visitors plus vegetation of open forest or clear grassland, has in many places resulted in a confusing multiplicity of parallel tracks. Presumably this is because of the open nature of the terrain which does not constrain people to any particular route.

The result is occasional navigational difficulty, and unsightly networks of tracks frustrating one's attempts to get away from it all. This may seem a minor point to some, but I am sure I am not alone in feeling that the only thing more annoying than no track where one should be is a dozen tracks where none should have been. (I agree. Ed.) It could be summed up as unnecessary despoilation of a supposedly wilderness area. If allowed to continue long enough, the process could quite easily lead to the appearance of 'tracks' such as those in Cradle Mt. - Lake St. Clare National Park in Tasmania - 3 m wide scars of bare earth snaking across the view from each peak - unpleasant to look at, unpleasant to walk on, and hard to restore to their original state.

The most likely solution is track marking with stakes (in grassland) or blazes (in forest). Many people oppose track marking on the principle that it encourages still more walkers, but I feel that in this case the benefits of aiding people to keep to the chosen track, outweigh the disadvantages. Should a particular marked route eventually become severally worn, then it would be possible to mark a new, parallel route and indicate that the old track is not to be used, allowing it to regenerate without further wear. This does work, as has been shown in parts of the Wild Dog Mts. Regeneration was so rapid in this case that it is no longer possible to pick out the old courses of tracks rerouted in this way during early 1972 - only two years ago.

It would again appear to be the task of NPWS to arrange and execute any such marking, chiefly because they are probably (hopefully?) concerned about where heavy use will be allowed. Some clubs might be prepared to arrange a weekend work-party or two in the name of preservation of the environment, but I would hesitate to nominate this club outright.

It could be commented that these problems are basically due to 'too many' walkers, the solution is simply to limit their numbers. This is basically more easily said than done, but I feel that some moves should be made to stop actively introducing uninterested people to the bush. It would be some sort of infringement of human rights to refuse to accept and instruct people who with little prompting wish to take up walking or ski-touring. However the open courting of other people (by 'Ski the Nordic Way' car stickers, etc) is unnecessary and probably quite harmful. Generally though, limitations on the number of visitors to wilderness areas are not yet warranted by the present situation, or acceptable by present standards.

I have raised two issues, one slightly more important than the other, that relate to conservation simultaneously by and from walkers. It is to be hoped that they will be taken up by the relevant bodies, particularly Federation, NPA, NPWS, and all individual walkers, and that significant action will be taken. However, remember that these were only two examples that happened to come to mind. The Royal National Park is another obvious one, and parts of the Blue Mts. and Kosciusko National Park could also be worthy of investigation. Overuse by walkers and campers of regions that should be preserved intact will be a growing problem in the quite near future.

Footnote: Since writing this article some months ago, one or two

further points have come to light. One is that NPWS is giving special thought to the problem of Bluegun - perhaps a decision has already been reached.

Another was an extract from a letter by an American member of the Kosiusko Huts Association, printed in the KHA Newsletter. I will quote an extract from the letter, explaining why national parks in the USA are in better condition than here:

- "1. There are marked trails in all parks. These satisfy the majority and reduce the damage to the environment. The minority can still go where they wish.
2. There are marked campsites. These and the very few huts must be booked ahead. Again this has reduced damage to the environment. Again for the few, including myself, who prefer to camp alone, there is nothing to prevent them doing so. Surprisingly few do. I suspect many Australians are similarly gregarious."

Nothing could be more to my point. Enough said.

Peter TUFT.

There was a brave streaker called Ross,
At Katoomba one day he did toss
 all his clothes to the ground
 then with leap and with bound
he raced up the First Sister's bare back.

Emerging into a new world
 -forbidding, eery
 half hidden in mist
 The lake seems to stretch -
 indefinitely.
Low vegetation cringes
 fearful of the mountains' wrath.

The mist lifts
 revealing the minute cirque lake
 - we feel less overpowered
welcomed into the new world.

.. R.B.

THE HAIRY-NOSED WOMBAT

DISTRIBUTION.

The hairy-nosed wombat, which used to be distributed throughout New South Wales, Victoria, and South Australia is now, apart from an isolated colony of a slightly different variety in Central Queensland, confined entirely to South Australia.

The existing colonies are to be found in a ten mile belt along the western bank of the Murray River from Morgan in the north, to the Marne River in the south. A few isolated colonies exist on Yorke Peninsula and Eyre Peninsula, with a very large colony on the Nullarbor Plain.

An interesting point from earlier days is that copper dug up by a wombat and found at the entrance to a wombat's burrow, led to the discovery of the Moonta copper field.

DESCRIPTION.

The hairy-nosed wombat derives its popular name from the very fine velvety hairs on its muzzle instead of the naked muzzle of the common wombat. The head is rather broad with fairly long pointed ears, and the eyes are soft and attractive.

It is a very compact animal and fully grown, is about three feet long, approximately a foot high, and weighs sixty to seventy pounds when in good conditions.

Its strongly clawed, extremely powerful, short legs are well adapted for digging the burrows in which it lives.

The fur is soft and silky and when in good condition is a lovely silver-grey with black guard hairs. Color variations do occur, but these are usually brought about by poor conditions and may vary from a dirty fawn through to almost orange-brown, with subsequent loss of texture.

It has a minute tail - only about an inch in length and being a marsupial, the female has a pouch. This differs from a kangaroo's pouch, because the wombat walks on all four legs, and therefore the baby must be prevented from falling out. The opening of the pouch tends to point backwards, but when carrying a baby, it is closed by a very strong circular muscle, and the baby curls itself around into a little circle so that the opening is closed tightly in the center.

BABIES.

Like all marsupial babies when born, the baby wombat is very immature and only about the size of an unshelled peanut. It crawls into its mothers pouch and fastens onto a teat (of which there are two in the pouch), and continues to grow in the pouch for several months.

As yet, very little research has been carried out on the breeding habits of the hairy-nosed wombat, so we have no records of rate of growth or other statistics as we have with the red kangaroo.

The babies appear to be about a year old before they are seen around the entrance to the burrow. At this stage they are approximately 15-lb. in weight and about 18-in. long.

They reach maturity at about three years of age.

FEEDING.

In the Blanchetown area where most of the observations have been carried out, the hairy-nosed wombat has become extremely specialised in its feeding habits, and this of course adds to the hazards of keeping a colony in good condition.

They prefer one type of perennial grass, but eat other grasses if they are available. Also, after rain, they eat the leaves of the wild geranium which grows on the clay flats, and in drought conditions they have been observed cropping the spore heads of the ground moss which grows in the area.

These wombats do NOT eat roots, bark and leaves as do common wombats.

DRINKING.

They have not been observed drinking from stock watering points even under severe drought conditions, but as soon as there is natural rainfall, and water is left in the hollows of the limestone capping in the country, the animals come out to drink and at this time can be approached within a few feet. This means that it is quite common for these animals to go for three or four months without water - even longer in times of severe drought.

LIVING HABITS.

The wombat lives in a burrow, and some warrens (a group of burrows) may consist of perhaps 20 or 30 burrows, but may only contain a few animals. Most burrows are dug down under the limestone capping and may extend many feet in length and 10 feet or more underground, but they do not appear to contain a lined nesting chamber as in the case of the common

NO, WAIT, LET HIM
SAVOUR A MOMENT
OF SUCCESS FIRST.



