

Romeo Watkins Lahey Memorial Lecture,
August 26, 1971.

Sponsored by the National Parks Association of Queensland

"THE GREAT NATIONAL PARKS MOVEMENT"

by Alec H. Chisholm



Romeo Lahey waist high in bracken. Outing to Mt. Castle, October 1938.

N.P.A. News — MARCH, 1972



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Possibly a trifle of explanation—or even of apology—is desirable to excuse the “presumption” of a Southerner in addressing you on the subject of Queensland’s National Parks.

Well, my excuse can be expressed, to some extent, by quoting a remark made some years ago by a Sydney reviewer of a book of mine. “This man”, he wrote, “is a mixture. He is a Victorian who calls himself a Queenslander and lives in Sydney”.

In my personal view, the emphasis in that comment should rest on the middle section. For, although almost 50 years have vanished since I returned to the South—went from a Brisbane newspaper to one in Sydney—I am still a Queenslander in spirit if not in fact. And I have this feeling because at a very impressionable age (while still in the blithesome twenties) I greatly enjoyed myself, during about nine years, among the flora and fauna—including the human fauna—of this compelling State. And among the Queenslanders who stand out in my recollection is Romeo Lahey, first President of this Association and a memorable figure in the history of Queensland’s National Parks.

It is deep-seated appreciation of Romeo Lahey’s work that has brought me here tonight. Actually, in addressing you I am, in effect, turning myself into a masculine edition of Dame Nellie Melba. Like her, I am staging one of several “comebacks”. After many years of chattering to audiences (especially school-children) in various States and countries, I had retired from the lecturing field. Last year, however, I found myself talking to a large group of Rotarians in Sydney—this because they were supposed to be promising conservation material—and, for the same reason, a little later on I flew out to Parkes, in mid-west N.S.W., and faced up to about 200 women. That was supposed to be a swan song. Yet here I am, now, doing “the Melba act” again!

I was about to say that this "comeback" constitutes the sole resemblance between Melba and myself. Maybe, though, I should add that we were both Victorian-born, both married in Brisbane, and both waved the Australian flag in the presence of crowned heads in Europe. (My monarchs, I should mention, were King Boris and King Ferdinand of Bulgaria, both of whom attended an ornithological conference which I addressed in Berlin in 1938).

Bearing on that period, I think I should also tell you that early in 1939, while voyaging back to Australia, I met an Englishman whose name is perpetuated in a Queensland National Park. He was Charles Wallace Alexander Napier Ross Cochrane Baillie. Does that name convey anything to you? Well, more precisely, he was Lord Lamington, the man who had been Governor of Queensland from 1895 to 1901. At first meeting I supposed that he, being on an Australia-bound ship, was about to re-visit Queensland, but in fact his destination was Ceylon.

As you may anticipate, I tried to engage Lamington in a talk about the great National Park that bears his name. The result, alas, was not enlightening. Although he was then rather younger than I am now, the former Governor had become somewhat dodderly—even more so than I am now—and so displayed little interest in the subject. "All I remember", he said, "is that I was taken up a mountain, among lots of trees, and brought down again".

Presently another recollection stirred. "I remember", Lord Lamington said, "that when we were coming down the mountain I shot a native bear. Its dying cries were terrible: They haunted me for years afterwards".

Did I sympathise with his lordship? Not at all likely! In fact, I told him he had got, in those haunting cries, just what he deserved.

That excursion of Lamington's to the McPherson Range took place in, I think, 1897, and was conducted by R. M. Collins, the laird of Tamrookum. Robert Collins, a native of Sydney who had become a notable pastoralist and a member of the Queensland Parliament, was of course a basic advocate of National Parks in this State. Especially did he agitate to have the splendid forests of the McPherson Range preserved. Authority, however, was short-sighted on the subject, and it was not until 1915, two years after Collins's death, that a large portion of the McPherson Range came under reservation. The responsible authority was J. M. Hunter, Minister for Lands in the newly-elected (Labor) Government led by T. J. Ryan; but the man chiefly stimulating the achievement was the one we are now commemorating, Romeo W. Lahey.

The story of Romeo Lahey's fight for the conservation has been told more than once—I myself wrote it, in some detail, in publications of two States, 52 years ago—and therefore it need not be discussed at length in this place.

In my view, the story had its basis not only in the work of R. M. Collins, but in the attitude of David Lahey and his charming wife, Romeo's parents. David Lahey, an outwardly austere but kindly little man, was a timber miller and merchant. Yet he was by no means a destroyer; he greatly admired the rain-forests above his headquarters at Canungra and wanted to see them preserved.

That attitude became communicated, in full measure, to his son, and thus, when the youth returned home from Sydney University in August 1911—just 60 years ago—he was distressed at learning that much of the Range, apart from a few forest reserves, had been thrown open to settlement. Earlier, both in 1908 and 1910, he had battled his way up the heights and had come under the spell of the magnificent scenery; and now he was resolved to try to save all this splendour for the nation.

"I don't remember what course of action I reasoned", he wrote soon afterwards, "but the idea of those glorious forests and falls being destroyed by selection filled me with an intense determination to have them saved—kept for people who would love them but who, at present, did not even dream of their existence".

His course of action, in fact, resolved into conferences with scientists in Sydney, bombardment of Queensland politicians, pleas to various shire councils, lantern lectures (particularly to residents of the Shire of Beaudesert), and even a house-to-house canvas for signatures to a petition praying that the area be reserved as a National Park.

When World War 1 broke out, in August 1914, Lahey's home-front fight continued. And, soon afterwards, it reached success when a new State Government came into power; for the National Park of the McPherson Range was proclaimed in July 1915. Happily, some 47,000 acres of country ranking among the most beautiful in Australia had been saved—and this through the pluck and indomitable endeavour of one young man.

His task accomplished, our resolute fighter, who was to become Lieut. Lahey, went off to join his two brothers at the war.

Personally, not having joined a Brisbane newspaper until late 1915, I missed the opportunity of assisting Romeo in his campaign. What I have told you is garnered from what he told me and from his diaries. But, in 1918, ten of us Brisbane naturalists gained firsthand knowledge of the new National Park, for then we spent a week in the area, mainly in the open (no tents) in the jungle on Mount Bithongabel.

It is at that spot, among the brooding old Antarctic beech-trees, that a cairn commemorating the pioneer visit now stands: I had the pleasure of unveiling that unique memorial five years ago.

Of course, we did not ascend the Range in the comfort of cars. The present picturesque road winding up from Canungra, basically designed by Romeo Lahey, did not exist in 1918. After travelling by train to Beaudesert we rode to the Stockyard Creek to meet Herb O'Reilly, and then rode, accompanied by packhorses, up a precarious—very precarious—track which served as the only outlet for the O'Reilly family. That accomplished, we proceeded several miles along the crest of the Range.

Arising from the journey as a whole, two things in particular impressed us. One was realisation of the pioneering zeal and fortitude of the O'Reillys. The other, as you may guess, was the splendour of the scenery and the high interest of the flora and fauna now revealed.

Naturally, the area presented our botanist, the late Cyril White, with a wealth of material, especially among the Antarctic beeches: those primeval trees, "bearded with moss and with garments green,

indistinct in the twilight". Birds, too, were thoroughly engrossing. To this day, over 50 years later, I can still hear the loud, imperious call which, sounding beside a track through the forest, brought Clyde Gillies and myself to an abrupt halt. That resounding "Chit-chit" was quite new to me, and so a calling of the author into view was essential. Within the next minute a small bird, quietly but prettily marked, streaked across the jungle path, and, after a trifle of reflection, I realised that we had seen for the first time, and newly recorded for Queensland, one of the most remarkable small birds of the world. It was *Atrichornis rufescens*, the rufous scrub-bird, also called ventriloquist-bird and mouse-bird, and it ranks with the Albert lyrebird, as probably, the most ancient avian inhabitant of the McPherson Range.

Were there any drawbacks, or trials, during those days and nights of December spent on Mt. Bithongabel? Yes, there were. First, because the season was dry, fresh water was scarce. Secondly, at that height the nights were very cold, and yet, although the weather remained fine, we were drenched each night by heavy mountain dew. In the third place, we suffered considerably from the attentions of red-backed scrub blowflies, resolute pests which contaminated food, blankets, socks—anything at all they could get at.

For another thing, we sustained after several days mild attacks of claustrophobia under the influence of the obsessing jungle, and, indeed, were rather glad to get back to one of the O'Reilly clearings and see the sun again. It was during that walk that the senior member of our party, Henry Tryon, the Government entomologist, took me by the arm, pointed to the great green walls around us, and said, "Don't you think, my dear sir, that these forests improve on the famous Blue Mountains of New South Wales and we should call them the Green Mountains of Queensland?" And, of course, I agreed.

On departing, we walked ten miles down the range and across country to the deserted Darlington schoolhouse (where we saw the old year out very quietly); then we walked a further four miles across the uplands to Hill View, then covered the twenty miles to Beaudesert by shire train, and so reached Brisbane the same night. It had been, for all of us, a memorable week.

A few days later I wrote in the Brisbane "Daily Mail" an account of that expedition, and soon afterwards I published in the weekly "Sydney Mail" a much more lengthy article on the subject. This article, which appeared on March 5, 1919, was entitled "The Green Mountains: Queensland's National Park". Beginning with references to R. M. Collins and Lord Lamington, the text went on to describe Romeo Lahey's campaign, and then it discussed the nature of the area and its flora and fauna. Visual tribute was given by six scenic illustrations and one of Romeo Lahey in uniform.

Not the least significant sentence in that article was its reference to the O'Reilly family. Those people had migrated to the Green Mountains from the Blue Mountains of N.S.W., and when the National Park was proclaimed they were the sole human residents in that great virgin region. It seemed to me, and I said so in the article, that it was fortunate that such a family was there; for, apart from the fact that they had created air-wells in the jungle, their presence ensured guardianship of the area, to some extent at least, and their help to visitors would be essential. With one of these considerations in mind I presently persuaded the Lands Minister (then Harry Coyne) to appoint E. M. ("Mick") O'Reilly an official, salaried Ranger of the area.

To this day I remain convinced, as doubtless do many people, that it was fortunate that the O'Reillys *did* "stay put", and that not only because of Bernard O'Reilly's remarkable feat, in February 1937, in discovering the lost Stinson airliner and rescuing its survivors. Actually, however, the family's remaining there was at one stage a matter of "touch and go". In, I think, 1921 Herb O'Reilly wrote to me in Brisbane advising that the family was about to negotiate with the Government for their properties to be resumed, and asking for assistance in the matter. I approached the Lands Minister on the subject, but only in half-hearted fashion; and in fact a feeling of relief developed when, soon afterwards, both sides advised me that negotiations had broken down. It seems probable that, failing satisfactory financial arrangements, the O'Reillys had decided then to launch a guesthouse, which enterprise has since become widely and favourably known.

Subsequently, as you well know, another guesthouse, Binna Burra, was established on the Range, and its guiding figure, Arthur Groom, became as a writer, like Bernard O'Reilly, an illuminating champion of the area. Twenty-three years ago (Nov. 1948) some fifty members of the Ornithologists Union spent a bright week at Binna Burra. As Chairman of that congress I recall that our guest speaker urged strongly that National Parks, while being studied, should be fully safeguarded and kept free of motor roads and hotels. That speaker was your founding President, Romeo Lahey.

Meanwhile, in 1919, a notable natural history collector, Sidney William Jackson, visited the Range. That happening came about because I had told his employer, the pastoralist and ornithologist H. L. White, of "Belltrees", N.S.W., of the finding of the rufous scrub-bird in the area, and had also told him that another, undetermined species, which Herb O'Reilly referred to as the "mystery-bird", appeared to be in the area but could not be found during our visit.

With some dubiety about the propriety of allowing a collector to operate in a National Park, but realising the need to have important questions cleared up before the area became popular, I gained at White's request a limited permit for Jackson, and so the latter spent from mid-September to mid-December on the Range. In that period, with Herb O'Reilly as assistant, he obtained a good deal of information. Also, he collected a specimen of the scrub-bird and one of the "mystery-bird", which latter turned out to be the olive whistler, a cold-area species with a highly melodious voice, hitherto unknown to Queensland. Each of these birds was given subspecific rank by White, the one being named *Atrichornis rufescens jacksoni* and the other (the olive whistler) being labelled *Pachycephala olivacea macphersonianus*. Perhaps you would rather call the latter, because of its distinctive voice, the "pee-poo bird".

Both of those birds, by the way, were subjects of special interest to your last English Governor, Sir Henry Abel Smith—he walked miles to do homage to them.

Having fallen in love with the Green Mountains, Sid Jackson again spent three months there in 1920, chiefly to gain further knowledge of the "mouse-bird" and the "mystery-bird" (on this occasion his assistant was Bernard O'Reilly, then aged 17); and soon after he departed, in mid-December I returned to the area with two newcomers, namely Dr. Jefferie Turner, a noted entomologist, and J. C. Smith, hon. secretary of the Queensland Naturalists Club. We camped then in "The Ark", a small hut which Jackson had so christened in recognition of the rain he experienced.

Because of the lush season, there was no difficulty this time in hearing, with frequency, the remarkable voices of both the "mouse-bird" and the "mystery-bird"; and in addition we were much engrossed by the multitude of butterflies and moths on view. Most of the tiny moths (many of which Smith and I captured in our battered hats) were astonishingly beautiful when seen under the microscope of the microlepidopterist, Dr. Turner.

Another sight that astonished me was one of a quite different nature. It was that of two girls—not Molly and Rose O'Reilly—strolling casually along a jungle path. Having supposed that visitors to such a wild area were, at the time, limited to males, I addressed a few questions to those lasses.

"Oh", one of them said, "we read in the 'Sydney Mail' last year an illustrated article entitled 'The Green Mountains', and it was so enthusiastic that we decided we must see the wonders of the area for ourselves".

It occurred to me, then, that those girls represented the advance guard of what would probably be a stream of tourists. Also, it occurred to me that Green Mountains, as a name, was more attractive, and more definitive, than the somewhat prosaic title Lamington. I think so still.

After 1920, as matters fell out, I did not see the crest of the Range, or the O'Reilly area, for almost thirty years. But in the meantime I did accompany rather large expeditions into parts of the region on two occasions. One was an expedition organised by David Lahey to introduce the then Governor, the nature-minded Sir Matthew Nathan, to the rain-forests. The other was an outing by a considerable body of politicians, municipal councillors, and businessmen, led by the then Premier, Mr. E. G. Theodore, to view part of the area in connection with a proposal to run a road across the Range and down the coast of New South Wales.

Mr. Theodore asked me what I thought of the idea of having a road for vehicles through the National Park. I told him the proposal was quite distasteful. An access road to a guest-house, yes, but no vehicular road to mar the peace of the area—only walking tracks. "Very well", the Premier said, "we'll forget about the road".

In reply to another question by Mr. Theodore, I expressed the opinion that the Forestry Department, whose chief business was the harvesting of timber, would not be a suitable authority to exercise control of this or any other National Park. In that view, however, I was wrong, for it seems to me that Queensland's Forestry Department has managed National Parks very well—certainly better than some other authorities have done in other states.

Reference to timber-getting has reminded me to dig into an old diary, there to find cuttings based on a leading article that appeared in the Brisbane "Courier" of April 12, 1920. After applauding "the great National Parks movement", the article emphasized the appeal of the McPherson Range, and then, to my astonishment, it declared that much of the timber in the area was valueless through lack of a road to make it commercially available.

The latter part of that statement was, of course, deplorable, and I said so in a letter to the newspaper. So, a day or two later, did Romeo Lahey. Thereupon the "Courier" recanted. It said, in effect, that its reference to timber-getting did not mean what we supposed it meant. The statement, it added,

was intended only to refer to timber on the private selections, which could perhaps be used for the building of a guest-house!

But the matter did not end there. Fearing that the Lands Minister might be subject to pressure from timber merchants, we naturalists rounded up delegates from ten influential societies and, so to say, "dazzled Mr. Coyne with science". Perhaps that was a useful move, for the records reveal that the Minister had developed an idea that old trees should be harvested rather than allowed to rot—I had quite an argument with him on this subject.

Incidentally, we suggested to Mr. Coyne that some definite system of National Parks management was becoming desirable and this could probably be best achieved by the appointment of boards of trustees. But that matter was left in abeyance. The immediate need was to safeguard the Parks.

Rather curiously, in the same year (1920) another type of menace to the National Park developed. A governmental advertisement then threw 2¼ square miles of the area open to occupation licence—meaning stock-grazing. Here David Lahey came to the rescue. After a trifle of conferring, he offered to finance me, for a healthy sum, if I would go to the Land Court auction and buy the licence with a view to holding it dormant. Accordingly, I went to the Land Court, and, to begin with, told the presiding officer that, in the opinion of all Queensland scientific and nature societies, the proceedings were illegal because they contravened a basic principle governing National Parks.

That poor man was puzzled. He adjourned the proceedings in order to consult the Minister. On resumption in the afternoon he announced that the Minister had ruled that the sale should proceed, and so we began bidding. Eventually, as I hesitated slightly on a certain figure, the auctioneer seized the opportunity to get square with me. Bringing his hammer down smartly, he awarded the licence to a cattleman from Hill View.

Anyway, that didn't really matter much. Apart from the probability that the Park as a whole would not be affected, my lack of success saved the good David Lahey from expense, and, what's more, publicity of the case was useful to our cause.

In fact, the Minister was moved to make something of a public apology on the subject. He pointed out that the licensee would be useful in keeping shooters out of the area, and in any case the licence could be terminated on 21 days' notice. The Government, he added, had "no intention of allowing interference with the reservation", either as a sanctuary for birds and mammals or as a timber reserve.

"The land is there", the Minister finally said—and here he proclaimed his conversion—"the land is there as a National Park for the people of Queensland for all time".

Thus, you see, the Movement was marching on.

On this note it seems fitting to end these recollections of matters affecting the Green Mountains half a century ago. But, perhaps, I may be permitted to quote briefly from a longish letter—disinterred from an old folder—which Herb O'Reilly sent to me in Sydney early in 1923 soon after I had left Brisbane. After giving further details of the unsuccessful negotiations with the Lands Department for the

surrender of the family properties, Herb went on to tell of the growing popularity of the National Park. Lots of people, he said, had either ridden or walked up the Range, and so the O'Reilly holdings were becoming something of a tourist centre. They had, he also informed me, even had a Church service on the Range!

Finally, being a generous fellow, Herb wrote, "I wish you every success in the big city of Sydney, and I sincerely thank you for your kind and valuable assistance to us while you were living in Brisbane".

Now, having lingered so long on the McPherson Range, I have little time to discuss other choice areas visited in the period under notice. Briefly, the most important company expedition was one made to the Bunya Range, in 1919, by members and friends of the Royal Australasian Ornithologists Union, of which I was then the State hon. secretary.

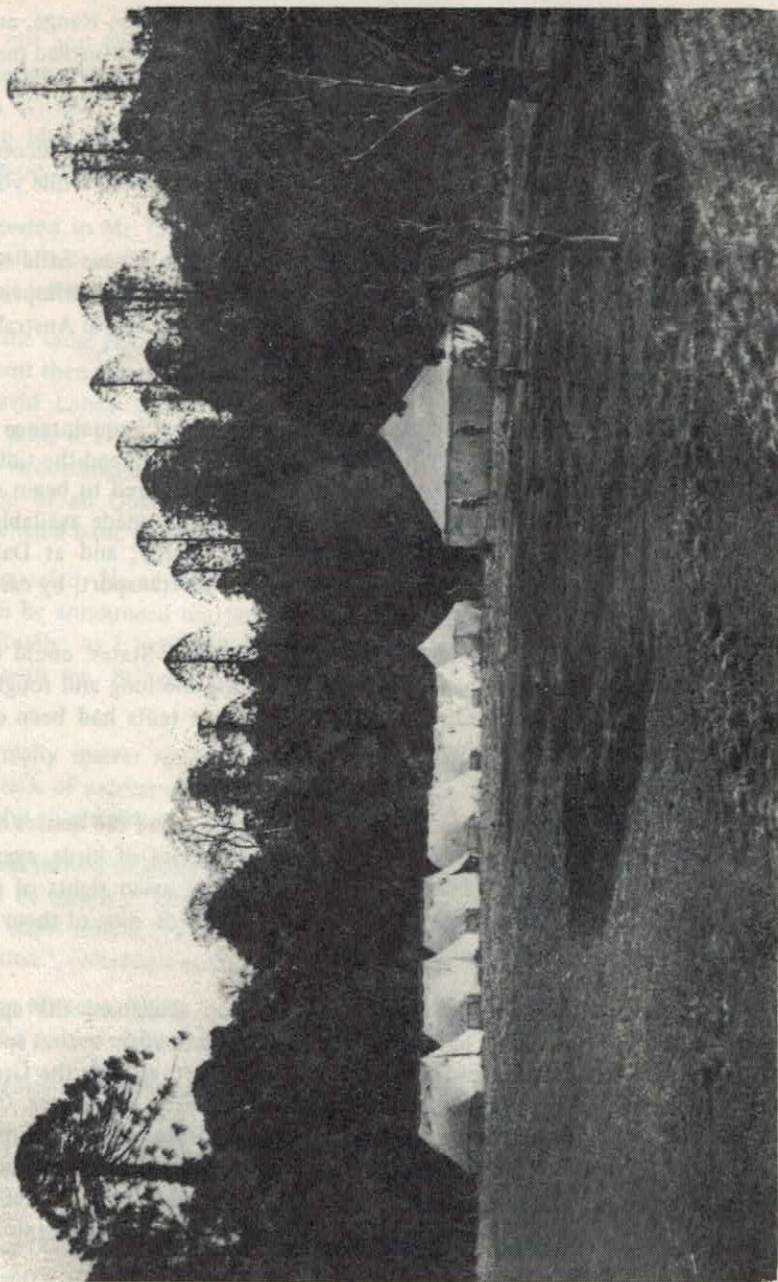
Although none of us Brisbane naturalists had personal acquaintance with the Bunyas, oldtime records indicated the area to be very promising, and when we spread the tidings, some fifty adventurers, from various States, made up the party. And how well they fared to begin with! Because I chanced to mention the expedition to Premier T. J. Ryan, he promptly made available free return passes, for all concerned, on the rail journey between Brisbane and Dalby; and at Dalby the local Chamber of Commerce (with which I had been in touch) provided free transport, by cars, to the foot of the Range.

Those trippers, and particularly the ones from other States, could scarcely believe their good fortune. Their spirits wilted somewhat, however, during the long and rough tramp up the Range. But they revived again on reaching Mount Mowbullen (where tents had been erected), and during several days afterwards much enjoyment was gained.

The magnificent bunya pines, the curious open spaces, and the masses of king orchids flowering on cliff-faces won special admiration. So, too, did many species of birds, even though both the lyrebird and the rufous scrub-bird were missing. Perhaps the chief avian sights of the area were the paradise riflebird and the satin bowerbird. At one time, 53 bowerbirds, nine of them males in full plumage, were counted on the greensward in front of the tents.

Subsequently, various members of the expedition acclaimed the appeal of the Bunya Range, either in lectures or articles, and as a result, the original reservation in that spectacular area was considerably extended by the Lands Department. For my own part, as with the Green Mountains, the Bunyas long remained simply a pleasant memory; but, almost thirty years later, Cecil Cameron of Chinchilla allowed me to see the range again. With recollections of the arduous climb of 1919 in mind, it was somewhat refreshing to be able to reach Mt. Mowbullen by motor-car. Certainly access roads present advantages!

I need do no more now than merely mention certain other "special" spots which were the subjects of excursions around fifty years ago. Mt. Mistake, to which in 1921 Dr. Price of Toowoomba led a party



ORNITHOLOGISTS CAMP AT BUNYA MOUNTAINS NATIONAL PARK, 1919.

(who also faced a long walk), was found to be a most impressive area, well worthy of National Park status. Stradbroke and Fraser Islands, too, were given attention, and I hope that the latter, with its remarkable forests and lakes, is still being safeguarded. As for Dunk Island, where I lived with the late "Beachcomber" Banfield for a time in 1921, and have since re-visited, I know that the National Park of that "delectable Isle" is quite safe and that the privately-owned areas, after passing through several hands, are now under sound and sympathetic control as a selective tourist resort.

It occurs to me to mention, too, that Cyril White and I found much of natural history interest when visiting the eminent Professor S. B. J. Skertchly at Meyers Ferry. At this day, however, the sight of that once tranquil spot always staggers me—for it has become the gaudy centre known as Surfers Paradise.

Furthermore, I recall with pleasure the first sight of various parts of Queensland when travelling, in a journalistic capacity, with Sir Matthew Nathan, and also accompanying, for a fortnight in each case, certain distinguished visitors, among them a keen conservationist in the person of Sir Arthur Conan Doyle and also His Royal Highness the Prince of Wales (now the Duke of Windsor) and his playmate Lord Louis Mountbatten. It was after leaving the Prince of Wales at the Border (in August 1920) that I spent several days in the Stanthorpe region, and there, among the great granite boulders, fraternised with lyrebirds that proved to be a new subspecies. As some of you may know, I named this striking discovery *Menura edwardi*, Prince Edward's Lyrebird.

Now, in drawing towards a close, here are one or two scraps of "secret history":

In 1921 we persuaded the Government to prepare a new measure to replace the antiquated legislation relating to safeguarding of native fauna. As the new Bill was not controversial, and not as rigorous as it should have been, its passage was expected to be prompt. But, to my dismay, with only a few hours of the session remaining the Minister for Agriculture (Mr. W. Gillies) told me he could not get the legislation through because the Opposition Leader had become antagonistic.

Waylaying the Opposition leader, I asked him what was the trouble. He replied that he had squabbled with the Agriculture Minister (about another matter) and was not going to oblige him in any regard. "Well, Bill", I said, "I want to tell you something. If you block this fauna preservation measure, as far as I'm concerned you'll never get your name in the 'Daily Mail' again, except in hostile fashion. What's more, I'll try to influence the other papers in the same direction!"

Can you guess what happened then? "Oh", the discreet politician said, "there's no need to take the matter so seriously. You can tell Gillies we won't oppose the Bill!"

Within the next hour, then, our measure went through the Assembly and was taken to the dying Legislative Council. There the responsible Minister knew nothing about the subject, so it became necessary to give him a few points and to suggest that after a brief speech he should put up Randolph Bedford, who could talk about anything. That was done. Randolph declaimed about the appeal of

wildlife, related how Italy and Spain ruined their countrysides by murdering small birds, and then, being unable to think of anything else at the moment, he suggested that "Mr. Chisholm deserved the thanks of both Houses of this Parliament".

To this day I retain, as a curious trophy, the copy of Hansard covering that adventure of 1921.

In the period under notice I was acting as honorary naturalist to the Department of Education (service consisted of preparing the Bird Day issues of the School Paper and addressing school classes), and also assisted the Department of Agriculture, mainly in relation to the issue of permits. Thus, when Harry Raven, of the American Museum of Natural History, was about to embark on a collecting tour in Queensland, he found himself under tight restrictions so far as certain rare species of both birds and mammals were concerned. Also, there was to be no collecting at all in National Parks.

Raven himself did not object to these limitations. But, a little later, when he reported the matter to New York, quite a tumult developed. The chief of the museum there was not accustomed, it seemed, to having his collectors told what they must not do. Accordingly, in the absence of any Australian official he wrote a protest to the British Embassy in Washington. The bewildered Ambassador passed the problem on to his Government in London. That Government, in turn, passed it to the Prime Minister of Australia. The Prime Minister, also perplexed, "passed the buck" to the Premier of Queensland; and the Premier, wrinkling his brow, transferred the complaint to the Minister for Agriculture. So, at last, the matter got back to his Under-Secretary, Ernest Scriven, the official who had issued the permit on my recommendation. Inevitably, he too did some passing. He simply got on the 'phone to me at the "Daily Mail" and exclaimed, "Can you come up here? I have a nice problem of your making".

Actually, that mixup involving the heads of four Governments merely amused Mr. Scriven. Thus, instead of giving me 'the sack', when I left Queensland soon afterwards he asked me to retain my Honorary Ranger's badge (which is headed No. 1) and to continue for a time to advise him from Sydney. It was from there, in 1923, that I drew up a permit for Captain (later Sir Hubert) G. H. Wilkins, who had come out on a collecting expedition for the British Museum. He, I may add, was subjected to the same restrictions as those that distressed the American Museum.

One other story that may amuse you arises from a meeting I chanced to have in Sydney, quite recently, with a middle-aged man from Brisbane. To my astonishment he said, "I was once a scholar of yours. That was in the Exhibition Hall in Brisbane some time near 1920, when you were trying to address a big crowd of kiddies and the lantern blew up and caused a stampede. Remember that?"

Remember it? Of course I did. The occurrence had passed from mind over the years, but, being prompted, I had no trouble in recalling it. What happened was that the Education Department—whose head then was a very able man, J. D. Story—asked me to talk to a combined group from various Brisbane schools on Bird Day. A limit of 1,000 youngsters was agreed upon. But, perhaps inevitably, one teacher after another slipped in a few extras and so the overall number rose to 1,700.

With all that crowd chattering at once, there was a deuce of a hullabaloo when I tried to begin, and so, after uttering only two or three sentences, I instructed the lanternist to get busy. He did so. But, within the next minute, his primitive contraption blew up and the cloth covering it caught fire.

Panic followed. Over and under the rows of seats those youngsters went. There was also a crush, somewhat alarming, on the stairs leading down from the gallery. However, numbers of tramwaymen who had brought the audience there were standing against the interior walls of the building, and they threw the doors open and helped the children out. In the event, therefore, apart from sundry damaged arms and legs, and lots of torn hats and stockings, plus slight burns to the lanternist, not much harm was done.

That lecture of a couple of sentences was the shortest one, and in a way the most "moving" one, I ever attempted to deliver; and it is rather curious that I should have forgotten the event until reminded of it, in Sydney a few weeks ago, by a man who had been one of the stampeding boys. (The date of the flare-up, I have since ascertained, was October 1917—almost 54 years ago.)

Here it should be mentioned that in the period under notice much conservation work was being done among Queensland children. And, happily, they were responding well. It was in fact a boy who, in a letter to my weekly Nature column in the "Daily Mail", revealed the surprising presence of lyrebirds in the Granite Belt.

Apart from many lectures and articles promoted by the Gould League of Birdlovers—they included much material in the old "Queenslander"—the Child Welfare Association was rendering stout service by arranging summer holiday camps: the first at Redcliffe for inland children and others in following years at Toowoomba and Mount Alford for city youngsters. Cyril White and I attended each of those outings: and we lecturers enjoyed them almost as much as the campers did.

Governor Nathan, too, was a force in this work. During one of his many country excursions (which included a trip arranged by David Lahey) Sir Matthew addressed no fewer than twenty schools—and, believe me, he made a different speech, mainly on forest preservation, at every one of them. Incidentally, at one small school, Merrimac in the Nerang Valley, all of the forty scholars greeted His Excellency on horseback, and he was so pleased that he mounted a horse and led the youthful squadron for the purpose of a photo.

Is work of this kind continuing among Queensland children now? It can be, of course, very valuable.

Now I should like to say that I was much interested in the report of addresses given to the National Parks symposium held at Cunningham's Gap in July last. Particularly impressive, because of the author's status, were the cordial remarks made by the Minister for Lands, Mr. Sullivan.

The Minister mentioned that during 1969-70 some 93,358 acres had been added to the National Parks estate, making a total of 2,462,475 acres now so reserved. This area, of course, has to be set against the total extent of Queensland, which is 670,500 square miles.

Relevant figures for N.S.W. were given in the Governor's Speech to Parliament in Sydney a few weeks ago. It was stated that in the twelve months to June 30 last 251,407 acres were permanently reserved, and that the total area of reservations in the State was now 2,960,611 acres. This figure, it will be noted, is about 500,000 acres more than the Queensland figure, although N.S.W. is less than half the size of Queensland. The N.S.W. reservations mentioned are not, however, all National Parks. By the same token, the Queensland total includes a large area of that arid region, the Simpson Desert.

In addition to Mr. Sullivan's refreshing speech, I read recently a summary of a notable address given to the Queensland Ornithological Society in June last by Mr. Doug Sherrington, M.L.A. It is good to know that you have at least one backbencher private member in the State Parliament who is assertive regarding the value of native flora and fauna and the importance of National Parks. In my day the politician who stood out in this respect was Donald Gunn, M.L.A. He, I recall, came with us naturalists when, in May 1922, we protested to the Minister for Agriculture against the devastating slaughter of koalas and possums; and in particular he girded against the cruel wire snares used to catch possums. "If I were a possum", Mr. Gunn told the Minister, "I would much rather be shot than snared!"

Now and again we enlisted the interest of other politicians. For example, both Houses of the State Parliament were represented at a public meeting held in Brisbane, on November 25, 1920, to emphasise the importance of National Parks in general and that of the McPherson Range in particular. Dr. John Shirley and I gave that meeting brief illustrated talks, and following speakers included Archbishop Duhig, Archdeacon Osborne and Romeo Lahey. Romeo, you see, sometimes had helpers of "higher" status than mere naturalists!

Incidentally, I note from another newspaper cutting of the period (1920) that it had already become necessary to restrain visitors from carving their names or initials on trees and rocks of the Green Mountains. And that reminds me to say that I hope the Government is not denying its National Parks Service adequate funds for the safeguarding of all reservations and in making the public acquainted with their interest. Protests on this point have been made in England recently. There a leading newspaper has urged strongly that more money be spent on National Parks. "Authorities should realise", the paper said, "that penny-pinching in such a matter is the road to disaster".

Financing need not, however, be wholly left to Governments. Thus, it was announced in Sydney last month that the National Parks and Wildlife Foundation, an independent body formed a year or two ago, had already raised more than \$500,000 to help the N.S.W. Government acquire adequate areas for National Parks.

To return to Mr. Sherrington's address: Apart from his general emphasis on the importance of National Parks, he lamented that relatively little of the remarkable brigalow scrub had been preserved, and, most justifiably, he urged that a reasonable portion of the Cape York Peninsula be safeguarded before it becomes ravaged.

Moreover, I note with much interest that he criticised certain phases of Queensland's official conservation control. First, he postulated that the control is spread over too many departments. (This was the case in N.S.W. until recently; but now all management there is under a National Parks and Wildlife Service—that is, all relevant activities except the pushful mining industry and certain pollution mediums.)

Additionally, Mr. Sherrington objected to certain birds being placed, without justification, on a list of "pests", and he claimed that the policing of Queensland's fauna protection legislation is at present quite inadequate. In many cases, he said, it permits "wanton destruction of wildlife".

As to this last matter, I am not now qualified to express an informed opinion. What I do know, however, is that in the South there is considerable perturbation over reports of raids on rare and beauti-

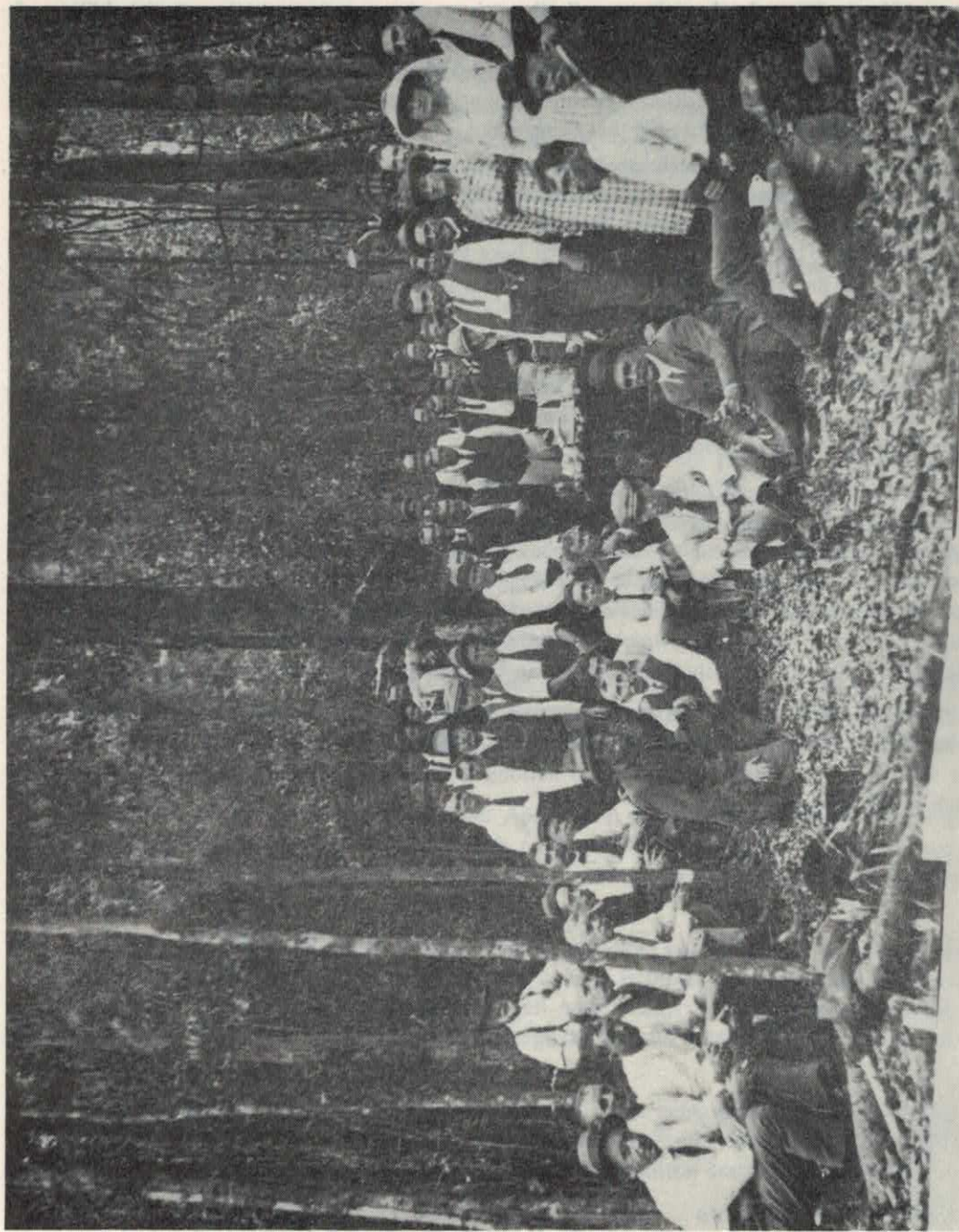
ful parrots in North Queensland, and, as well, there is much concern over the massive killing of kangaroos. One Sydney newspaper, on the authority of a Brisbane correspondent, recently gave Queensland the unpleasant label of "Slaughter State". Another Sydney newspaper, the "Daily Mirror", also produced lately a choice scrap of criticism. In a leading article dealing mainly with political matters it wrote—mark this!—"Many Australians feel that Queensland is not part of Australia at all".

Whatever may be thought of such asinine remarks as that concocted by the "Daily Mirror", it has to be said for Sydney newspapers that in recent times they have been giving a vast amount of space to matters touching the environment, notably the impact of mining activities, pollution, and the indiscriminate use of pesticides. Three problems in particular have been, and still are, the subjects of sharp controversy; these are the menace of mining activities to the Colong Caves area, Blue Mountains (limestone), to the Burrigorang Valley (the Clutha coking coal Project), and to the Myall Lakes National Park, (rutile).

In the "Sydney Morning Herald" recently a defender of the Myall Lakes made the sage declaration, "There is no way for mining companies to operate, as they claim, 'with a clear conscience'. Companies don't have consciences. They only have appetites".

On the whole, then, I suggest that in Australia, as in certain other countries, the current period is crucial in regard to safeguarding the environment and its natural attributes. And, lacking general alertness, the position here will continue to be dangerous because of the upsurge of population, which must in time result in a movement that will be beneficial if well controlled: that is, Decentralisation. A member of the Australian Conservation Foundation emphasised this point a few weeks ago "The present day", he wrote, "is a testing-time for Australia's National Parks, and it is more than ever important that their nature and aims should be known and understood by as many people as possible".

It follows, therefore, that congratulations are merited by the Queensland National Parks Association, the Naturalists Club, and all other nature-minded people, including politicians of goodwill. You people are building, with public spirit, on the national foundations so resolutely laid, long ago, by fighters such as Romeo Lahey.



Political and commercial leaders visit Lamington National Park in March 1919, when a road through the reservation was being considered. Two subsequent Premiers, E. G. Theodore and W. N. Gillies, are in this group.