



## **INTERVIEW WITH FIONA MACDONALD BRAND**

(NPA Life Member 1982)

*MATTHEW:- This is a transcript of an interview by Matthew Higgins with Fiona MacDonald Brand at her home in Canberra on 21 December 1999 for the NPA Oral History Project.*

*Fiona, thanks very much for being involved in the project. A key member of NPA, of course, a foundation member. I'm very much looking forward to hearing some of your memories this morning, and if we can start with your early years - born in 1934 as Fiona MacDonald, up the coast - Grafton, did you say?*

FIONA:- Yes, that's right.

*MATTHEW:- And then moved to Sydney at 18 months of age and studied at Balmain Teachers College from 1952, and I understand that it was through that you met Allen Strom and, of course, that had quite a significant impact on you.*

FIONA:- Yes, yes it did. He would be one of the people who have influenced me most, I'd say, in my life. He was in a unique position, I suppose, in the college as he had contact with all students. He was the arts and crafts teacher. Over the years, before he came as a lecturer to that college, he had become more and more concerned about the environment. He loved it, he spent his spare time walking and so on. He had worked in the National Fitness Programs of the NSW Education Department. He could see the degradation of the environment increasing and he felt that it was only by education and knowledge that people could reverse that. He thought that young teachers going out into the schools would have a great influence on children, especially rural children in rural areas. He formed a bushwalking club in the 1940s - about 46 or 47 - called the Caloola Club. Caloola means climb high. Not only did people walk they were expected to attend weekend classes to learn about the environment, to learn about geology and flora and fauna. Not that there were any exams but if you accepted membership you were certainly expected to be part of that. During school holidays he ran expeditions of a fortnight or a week in length and these were mainly in NSW and Victoria. The Club acquired an old Federal truck and a wonderful man, Mr Dingleli and his wife, kept this truck going.

*MATTHEW:- What was that name?*

FIONA:- Dingleli. He was a mechanic, a car mechanic in Croydon, Sydney. His son had gone through the college, you see, and that's how they'd met up with Strom. This truck, Federal truck, had boxes on either side of the tray at the back and a canopy over the top. You put your gear in the boxes and you sat on them. It wouldn't be allowed these days, of course. It would fit, I suppose, about 20 people. When you'd get to your destination a great big marquee tent would be put up and we'd all sleep in that. Mrs Dingleli would cook a meal. So we had wonderful trips to the Warrumbungles, Nandiwar Range and out to Broken Hill. All the time you were being told, in a pleasant way, about the country you were travelling through and the environment; so all the time you were being taught. Certainly when I left college, nature study was one of the subjects you had to teach your children, and of course, I was very enthusiastic about that. I taught it with this slant; this is here, we must protect it, it's unique - all the things I'd learnt from Allen Strom.

*MATTHEW:- OK, and when did you finish at Balmain Teachers College?*

FIONA:- Well, it was only a two year course in those days for primary teachers, so I graduated at the end of 1953 and went teaching in 1954.

*MATTHEW:- And you came to Canberra in 1958.*

FIONA:- Yes.

*MATTHEW:- And the National Parks Association was formed only two years later. I'm very inter-*



*ested to hear from you the events that led to that formation.*

FIONA:- Well, there was a general movement, I feel, within the community here and in NSW. The NSW NPA had only been formed in 1957, I think it was, the year before I left Sydney. Allen Strom was the person who led that. A fellow named Moppett was another leader in that move. I joined the NPA in NSW. Queensland, of course, had had a National Parks Association well before that. I became involved with it here because of Nancy Burbidge, Dr Nancy Burbidge of the CSIRO, who was a member of the Academy of Science group of scientists who were involved in Tidbinbilla. She must have felt that more should be done and talking with her colleagues and talking with a wonderful photographer, Edric Slater, she arranged for an exhibition of his photographs showing the environment of our alps area to be shown.

*MATTHEW:- When you say our Alps you mean the ACT country or NSW?*

FIONA:- NSW - all the Alps in particular. I cannot remember where this was held, but it was open to the public and was advertised on the ABC, we had good local radio in those days. I went along after school one day and saw this exhibition. Nancy was really testing the waters to see how much interest there was in forming a National Parks Association. I don't know whether we had to fill in a form, I presume we did or something like that. After that a public meeting was called in March 1960.

*MATTHEW:- Had you met Nancy prior to this exhibition?*

FIONA:- No, I had no knowledge of her. When I came to Canberra there was no Canberra Bushwalkers, there was the Alpine Club which organised a few summer walks and I joined them. My first walk was up Mt Tennent. In the winter time you were supposed to go skiing so I joined the Y [YMCA] Ski Club. I was only a member of the Alpine Club for one year and then I became involved with the Y Ski Club. So really I was looking for a group; I suppose, unconsciously I was looking for a group to join. When this meeting was called in 1960 I went along. By then I was married, I was then Fiona Brand.

*MATTHEW:- And your husband was Alexander, or Sandy.*

FIONA:- Alexander and he came along with me to that meeting. It was held in the Institute of Anatomy - that old building, beautiful old building. My memory is that the room was full of people and an interim committee was set up.

*MATTHEW:- That meeting was chaired by Lindsay Pryor wasn't it?*

FIONA:- Yes, that's right. Chaired by Lindsay, but then Dr Nicholson became the first President and a committee was formed; Nancy, of course, was on that committee. It was decided to have monthly meetings and at some stage we started going on some outings as well. The outings were always instructive sort of outings, and if Nancy was there you would be made aware; you would stop and look at the flowers and the plants and so on, or it would be a geology trip. The outings didn't involve long bushwalks at that stage in those first couple of years.

*MATTHEW:- And what were the inaugural aims of the organisation - a national park?*

FIONA:- Yes, well that was Nancy's idea. That was the whole purpose, I think, for her at the time, really for the ACT. The ACT was supposedly a sort of sanctuary, all wildlife was protected within its borders but that was just a statement you saw on posters around about. She felt that there should be a national park so her slogan was 'a national park for the national capital'.

*MATTHEW:- And although the ACT was meant to be a sanctuary it clearly wasn't in real terms.*

FIONA:- No, no it wasn't as there was a lot of rural land. It was a good start because, hopefully, the firearms laws were enforced and so on, and you always taught the kids not to pick the wildflowers and all that sort of thing.



*MATTHEW:- I remember reading in an early Bulletin or an Annual Report that by 1962 you had had a rubber stamp made with the slogan "A National Park for a National Capital".*

*FIONA:- Yes, that's right. We put that on all our envelopes. I became Secretary, I think it was probably in 1962 when Nancy became President. In those days we had a committee meeting once a month, often at the CSIRO in one of the rooms there, but the Secretary did just about everything. You had to write any of the letters that were directed to you from the committee. You had to write the *Bulletin* which was just A4 paper, a couple of sheets of that folded.*

*MATTHEW:- This done on a duplicator like a roneo?*

*FIONA:- Yes, well it was at first, and then it was done in a better manner. I asked a friend to draw a cover for me, that was Kelvin Cameron who lives in the Blue Mountains but you had to write it yourself, the whole *Bulletin* really, getting snippets from other publications. When I look at them now, I think how didactic they were, they really preached - preached to the converted, I suppose, but still that was our *Bulletin* and we advertised our meetings, advertised our outings and we just circulated it among our friends. As Secretary you had to fold them and write the addresses on, as I couldn't type. So it was a big job in those first few years.*

*MATTHEW:- And of course 1962 was an important year because it was then that several of you went on a walk to Mount Kelly.*

*FIONA:- Yes.*

*MATTHEW:- Could you tell me about that?*

*FIONA:- Yes, well having decided that our aim was to get a national park we then looked at the map and thought well where should it be? We felt that it should be just Crown land that we asked for so that there would be no excuse that there wasn't enough money to get one. So we didn't want freehold land....[phone interruption]*

*MATTHEW:- Continuing after that phone interruption, you were saying that the plan was to have only Crown land because there wouldn't be any problems with resumption of properties.*

*FIONA:- Yes, that's right and you couldn't look at the Cotter area because that was catchment so you were limited to a certain extent in where you could have a national park, we felt. Fortunately the Alpine Club was organising a walk into the Mount Kelly area, Alan Bagnall was the leader. Bob Story heard of this and he mentioned it to the committee. The only other bushwalkers on the committee were Julie Henry and myself because it was going to be a pack-walk so the three of us went with Alan and I don't know how many Alpine Club people, I've forgotten how many. We set off and I took photographs as I went, fortunately, which I've got on slides. We set out and in those days there were no fire trails in that area, so we just walked on an old bridle track as there must have been summer leases up there under Kelly. Alan knew this area very well and we followed this bridle track up Sam's Creek, camped under Mt Scabby. Then the next day we walked to Mt Kelly, climbed it and then walked out.*

*MATTHEW:- And that was the promised land?*

*FIONA:- Yes. We walked through the most beautiful areas, it looked untouched although there had been some summer grazing, but it had never been cleared. No roads. The streams were clear, no erosion and it just was beautiful bushland. When you climbed to the top of Mt Kelly well, you've been up there Matthew, you know the beautiful view. It's just that 360° view of mountain range after mountain range to Jagungal. We just felt, well yes, this should be the national park, this area here. When we came back...[phone interruption]*

*MATTHEW:- Again after the phone, you were saying that when you came back from that walk...*

*FIONA:- When we came back we then had to set to, we felt, to draw up some proposal. Sandy (my husband) arranged for us to fly over the area and do a little aerial survey. John Gray was our*



pilot and Julie [Henry] went and Sandy and myself.

*MATTHEW:- Is that John Gray from the CDC?*

FIONA:- Yes, that's right.

*MATTHEW:- He was a pilot?*

FIONA:- Yes, he was our friend. So we flew over and it was in the winter months when there was snow on the mountains. It wasn't all that useful in a way, but it did give us an idea. You really have to look at the area on foot. Nancy, of course, brought in all her CSIRO friends. Dick Shodde wrote up the list of birds of the area; that was his field at CSIRO. Robert [Story] and Nancy did the flowers and I've forgotten who looked at the geology of the area. We wanted to describe the area as thoroughly as possible.

*MATTHEW:- Edric Slater was also involved?*

FIONA:- We used Julie's photos really of the area, just some colour photos of the area to put in the proposal. I don't know whether Ed was involved in that but he might have been, I've forgotten that. Then it had to be written up, Julie and Robert and Nancy did that. Finally it was ready, we met in Julie's room in Havelock House, in her tiny room and put the sheets together and pasted the pictures in. We prepared about four really good productions with colour photos and maps. An appointment was made and Robert, Nancy and Julie took it to the Minister and presented the proposal.

*MATTHEW:- That was Gordon Freeth?*

FIONA:- Was it? I'd forgotten who it was. It was just accepted and there was no comment in particular from him at the time. That same proposal was presented over and over again every time we had a new minister and their comments were always favourable "yes, yes, a good idea, but we have no money" and so that went on and on, year after year.

*MATTHEW:- And over time, by the end of the 1960s, Fiona, the area involved had grown considerably.*

FIONA:- Yes. The idea was simmering there obviously within the Department and pieces were added to our initial small area so that finally when it was declared, it was getting up towards half of the ACT. It certainly is half of the ACT now.

*MATTHEW:- Now during this period of 17 years, say, between the Mount Kelly walk in 1962 and the declaration of Gudgenby in 1979, was it very frustrating for NPA and for you and Bob Story and Julie and Nancy who had been involved right at the beginning, to have to wait for so long?*

FIONA:- Well, I think we were remarkably patient really because we had other issues too on our plate. I mean right at the very start, a very local issue that we felt that we should be involved with was the Westbourne Woods issue.

*MATTHEW:- We will talk about those. If we can just focus on Gudgenby. OK, you had these other issues to deal with as well but how was the Gudgenby campaign maintained? For example, did you use the media very much - the paper or the radio stations?*

FIONA:- No, I don't think we did. We tried to keep interest just in the environment in general, I suppose, on the public side by having some poster competitions within the schools and essay competitions. The Association did run a couple of seminars and we had some very good speakers, visiting speakers, interstate speaker - Judith Wright was one of them.

*MATTHEW:- Vincent Serventy was another.*

FIONA:- Yes, he was another. Don McMichael was another.

*MATTHEW:- Milo Dunphy.*



FIONA:- So that we felt that our role was to educate the population about environmental matters. There was such a quick changeover of ministers that we just kept on putting ourselves in that position of, "here we are, this is our proposal, look at us", and so I suppose we were never really forgotten within the Department.

MATTHEW:- *Giving a copy of the proposal to each new minister because you had, well, Doug Anthony coming in and various others and then with the Whitlam government, Interior disappeared and it became Capital Territory or whatever. As well as that if a minister lasted for a second year or a third year, did you write to them each year and say, "Is there any progress"?*

FIONA:- No, I don't think we did. We're not a highly militant group, the NPA. As I say, there were so many other issues that would occupy your committee's time that I felt that that was just always there, but we felt we just couldn't focus all our time on it, I suppose.

MATTHEW:- *OK. Now when the decision was announced in 1979, on the centenary anniversary, I think, of Royal National Park declaration, that Gudgenby Nature Reserve was going to come into being, what was the feeling for you and for NPA?*

FIONA:- Great relief and justification, I think, for all our efforts. It's been quite a privilege, I think, to have been in at the ground floor and to have seen that finally achieved.

MATTHEW:- *Was there any celebration held by NPA in 1979?*

FIONA:- No, I don't remember that we had a big celebration. It wasn't until Tom Uren announced it as a national park that a group of us felt that it needed a big special walk. We walked up to Mount Namadgi and carried a couple of bottles of champagne and some food. I know I took meringues because they were the lightest to carry and we had a celebration at the foot of Namadgi.

MATTHEW:- *And that was in 1984 - the year the announcement was made.*

FIONA:- Yes, yes.

MATTHEW:- *Do you recall who else was on that walk?*

FIONA:- Well, Neville Esau was on it and Reg Alder, and I'd need to look at a photo to really say who was on it.

MATTHEW:- *Did the NPA play much of the lobbying role between 1979 and 1984 to get national park status as opposed to nature reserve status.*

FIONA:- Oh yes, yes there was. There were more letters written and more visits to speak with people about it. Unfortunately, being a school teacher and working for much of my school teaching life in Queanbeyan, I could never be a visitor to government departments. That was always done during the day and so that always fell to committee members who worked within the city itself and could get to meetings. I know Neville was very involved with that and Den Robin and they took Tom Uren out into the bush and showed him the area. Of course he was interested in the environment, fortunately, and, of course, as soon as he saw it he just said to his offsideers, "well, this will have to be a national park - so see to it" and it was done. It was just so easy that last step that you just wondered why it had been so hard to get to there.

MATTHEW:- *There was a discussion over a fair period of time, I think, wasn't there as to whether the national park would be administered by the Australian National Parks and Wildlife Service or by the ACT's own Parks Service. Do you remember that being much of an issue?*

FIONA:- Oh no, that only came up - well was it ten years ago. It seemed as if the Australian National Park group were sort of trying to enlarge their kingdom, we felt, and that was just an idea that was floated, but I don't think it was ever seriously considered by our local people.

MATTHEW:- *OK, just to continue on with the Namadgi theme for a little bit longer. You've been*



*involved and on the NPA committee for many years - 25 years, I think, until you stepped down from it just recently, a few years ago. You held many different positions there including on the Gudgenby sub-committee and on the Namadgi sub-committee. What sort of issues were you dealing with there and perhaps management since the park came into being as well?*

FIONA:- Well, we became the watchdogs really. Once we had achieved our aim we knew that you just couldn't step back and say, well that's that. When the Plan of Management was written we thoroughly went through it - Reg Alder in particular with great thoroughness went through it - and listed all sorts of weaknesses that were felt, and we put them all to the Department. Of course, that Management Plan is way out of date now. It was meant to be reviewed and re-written in five years time and that's a long time ago now. Every now and then we bring that matter up with the Department and you get various responses, that it's being done. One response, a fairly recent one, was well you just put it up there on the shelf anyway! So that has been of concern to us, the Plan of Management, but we have read it and we know it and if we feel that the management of the park is not in order we do say so.

MATTHEW:- *Can you give me some examples there.*

FIONA:- Well, I suppose the most dramatic one was really that dreadful car park that was put in the Gudgenby valley.

MATTHEW:- *For the Yankee Hat track?*

FIONA:- Yes, the Department built a track across to the Aboriginal paintings and built this very substantial bridge. They then obviously felt that there should be an enlarged car park; not the one that was just there at the edge of the pines and hidden from view and unbeknown to anybody. Suddenly this great scar appeared on the ridge top, with a gate and a road into it. A huge area scraped clean by bulldozers and ringed with huge granite boulders, also huge logs from beautiful big old trees.

So Reg and I and, I think, Joan Goodrum probably was involved, and rushed out. Somebody alerted us to this. We weren't at the opening of the track, that was in Rosemary Follett's time. We weren't invited to that opening so we hadn't seen it then, but somebody must have told us about it and we rushed out. What appalled us more, I suppose, than just the scraped area, was this removal of rocks from the granite clusters, that is a great feature of that ridge line. Huge clusters of granite and they had been dragged out. The Plan of Management says that there is to be no removal of rocks and so we had them by the short horns really. All the environmental groups were alerted to this and that marvellous woman, Jacki Rees, was President at that time of the Environmental Centre of the groups. She called a meeting of all the groups and also the presence of people from the Department. She said, "It's going to be removed, isn't it?" and they meekly said, "Of course" and so the rocks were replaced but of course it's never the same, you can't really do that. Reg was involved in that, sort of directing where the rocks should go.

That was an example, but it's a sad example because it should never have happened. Then the argument was where will it be and Greg Hayes said to me, "Well where do you want it, Fiona" with an exasperated tone. I said, "Well, back where it originally was, what's wrong with that?" and, of course, their planning officer was there at that time when that comment was made and he looked very relieved because he had drawn up a plan for that area and it hadn't been used. Also on that same issue, on the rocks and that particular area, we had a meeting with Greg Fraser.

MATTHEW:- *And he was what...Head of Parks Service at that time?*

FIONA:- Yes, he was. Joan [Goodrum] and Reg [Alder] and I had a meeting with him and he came out to look at the area. Although we had some differences with him, I felt that he was learning, he was willing to learn about the environment and about the area. Some of those in



charge have not been so willing.

*MATTHEW:- Now there has been a formal mechanism for having an input into the Service's decision, the ACT Parks and Conservation Consultative Committee, which NPA has played a role in and you have been on that committee. Can you tell me about some of the goings on there, you know, how you have operated there.*

FIONA:- Well, we had an NPA representative on that but it was a group of about 12 people, both professionals and non-professionals and people within the Department and people from outside. Peter Cullen was the chairperson. They met sort of monthly and all issues were discussed, it wasn't just Namadgi National Park. It was all environmental issues for the city as well, the parklands, the hilltops, tree plantings, street-scapes, water quality and everything, so there was a lot to deal with.

In the 1990s, Bill Wood, then our local Minister for the Environment, asked me if I would go on, not as an NPA representative, but just as an interested environmental person. I was on it then for three years and found it most rewarding. It was most interesting to be in on those matters and we had field days out looking at like the Mugga estate and so on. Looking at places that should be reserved and hopefully would be and all that sort of thing. Even though I wasn't representing NPA I must say that I put forward NPA issues all the time.

*MATTHEW:- And did the government and the Parks Service take a lot of notice of the committee, and the Minister, did he take much notice?*

FIONA:- Well, Bill Wood did. Bill Wood certainly took notice of it and yes, I think, that our views were approved of. Sadly once Labor were voted out and Kate Carnell's group came in this was disbanded and a smaller group has now been formed. Eleanor [Stodart] is on that for the NPA but I don't know, I haven't heard very much from them about what they are doing.

*MATTHEW:- OK.*

FIONA:- Sadly for Bill Wood, just before he had to leave of course because he was no longer the Minister, a new Director was to be appointed and he was going to advertise Australia wide to get the very best environmental person he could find, but that didn't happen, which I think has been a sad thing for the running of environmental matters in the ACT.

*MATTHEW:- Just to go back a step, something I meant to ask you before. In that campaign for well Gudgenby Nature Reserve and Namadgi National Park, NPA was obviously a major community group player. Which other groups played a role in that campaign? For example, the Canberra Bushwalkers had some input, did they not?*

FIONA:- Well, they say they did but I don't remember that they did. They supported it, of course.

*MATTHEW:- Didn't they take a couple of politicians out there - John Knight and Haslem - on a walk up to Mt Kelly?*

FIONA:- Perhaps they did, to show them the area, but I must say there didn't seem to be much liaison between us and them.

*MATTHEW:- But they were aware of what you were doing?*

FIONA:- Yes, they were aware, because at some stages they did have an environmental sub-committee, I believe. I didn't belong to the Canberra Bushwalkers, but they certainly weren't involved with the original proposal and so on. I always feel a bit puzzled when they state, and they have stated, that they were the people who proposed it. I have heard that false statement which is quite wrong and I hope will be corrected in history.

*MATTHEW:- OK. Another issue in the management of the park and national parks generally is the question of natural heritage on one hand and cultural heritage on the other, and that's certainly*



*been seen in NPA's own history. Would you like to comment on that?*

FIONA:- Yes, that has been a little bit of a division amongst members. You know, things grow slowly. When we made the first proposal we were only interested in the natural environment, I must admit that. I don't think we even looked very much at the Aboriginal input, which you didn't in the 1960s, sadly. I mean Aboriginal issues weren't at the forefront of our minds at all, to our shame. So the proposal was to protect the land and all that grew and lived on it so that it could be handed on to future generations as an example of what the world looked like, you know, before human activity destroyed it. I think that's what was the aim probably of the very first national parks. But over time we have come to realise that human impact has changed any spot in the earth to some degree, that is part of the evolving of that land and you have to acknowledge it. So once we got into the late 1970s and 1980s, we started to feel interested in the old buildings that were still there and the Aboriginal stone arrangements that we found. I think that was all just part of Australia's becoming aware that the old things were going and times were changing fast, and these things had a place and a beauty of their own and a value.

It was our President, Ross Carlton, who brought this issue of the old homestead in Orroral Valley to our notice and said I think we should, you know, put pressure on the Department to preserve this building. It received an enthusiastic response from a lot of our members, but there was a group who felt that huts and old buildings had no part in a national park. They resented all the huts in the Kosciuszko National Park, for instance. The majority either had no opinion or thought, yes, it would be worthwhile and so our big project was the Orroral Homestead.

*MATTHEW:- OK, we'll talk about Orroral in more detail in a little while. While we're just sticking on these issues sorts of questions, can we talk now about issues elsewhere in the ACT. Now, you said an early one was Westbourne Woods, for example.*

FIONA:- Yes, well that came to our notice very early on, my memory seems to tell me that it was within the first year. Westbourne Woods, which was an arboretum, belonged to Forestry and had been planted by Weston the great forester, had become a place where the public visited. I'm told, my informant in this is old Mr Andrew Wood who was quite a character within the Forestry School, it was he and somebody else who in the terrible drought of 1939-42 kept those trees alive by just taking trucks of water and watering them. It was an area used by the Boy Scouts, the Girl Guides and Sunday School picnics and so on, you know, as a lovely shady area close to the suburbs that you could go and picnic in. So when the Golf Club, the Canberra Golf Club, who had a golf course on the valley floor, were told that they would have to vacate that because they would be damming the Molonglo River, they were given the Westbourne Woods area. Now I think they had been promised that a long time ago. Of course nobody had taken much note of this, but when it became a reality there was a huge uproar from the Canberra community that this public area was to become, really, a private golf course.

The NPA was approached to hold a public meeting on this issue which we did. The room was stacked full of people including standing. A lot of people came from the Golf Club and when the motion was put that the Golf Club not be allowed to move in there, it was almost lost because of this huge number of Golf Club members who had stacked the meeting. But we lost out on that, the public lost out on that. There was too much top brass, I think, with golf players involved.

*MATTHEW:- I've noticed through looking back through previous walks programs that NPA walks have at least gone to Westbourne Woods, for example, John Banks in the 1970s used to lead walks there.*

FIONA:- Oh yes, that's true. We insisted and some of the foresters insisted too, Eldridge.

*MATTHEW:- Ken Eldridge.*

FIONA:- Yes. He still insists that the public be allowed to go and view this arboretum. It's an his-





toric arboretum, and for a while I made a point of running an outing there every year, but to my shame I haven't pursued that in the last ten years or so. Yes, we tried to go once a year, but we always had to write a letter asking permission and stating who would lead us and all that business. It was grudgingly allowed, but really some of the letters weren't very warm in their response, so we were just suffered to go in. But Ken Eldridge has run a walk every month, hasn't he. He still does.

*MATTHEW:- Now a couple of other places which NPA was involved in early, one was Molonglo Gorge.*

FIONA:- Yes, well that was Nancy's [*Burbidge*] idea. She just came to a meeting one night and said there's this gorge out there (it must have been brought to her notice) and she had written up a proposal. So we put it in and it was accepted quite easily. There was no bother with that one, nor with Gibraltar Falls that was also accepted without any bother. We got those within the first few years.

*MATTHEW:- So the NPA sent a letter to the Department of the Interior?*

FIONA:- Yes, made a proposal that they should be reserves and it was accepted. In contrast to the national park they were easy.

*MATTHEW:- Now Black Mountain, that was an area of some conflict.*

FIONA:- Oh yes, that wasn't an easy one. You know, the general idea of Burley Griffin was that all the hilltops should remain untouched. Well, of course, that hasn't happened, you've got edifices on most of our hilltops; Majura, Ainslie and Red Hill. They've all had buildings and roads up them but Black Mountain didn't. You see it was different, it didn't have anything on it. It wasn't just NPA, there was community outcry when it was proposed. There was a bit of outcry when it was proposed that these big roads would go round the mountain but I mean, I think, you have to live with that but there was a big outcry when it was proposed that this tower should be put on Black Mountain. Not just an ordinary small tower as you get on the other peaks but this huge structure that would have a restaurant and so on. So we joined with a group that were called Citizens to Save Black Mountain (it's written in our 40 years anniversary, I did the job of writing up about the Black Mountain proposal). A citizens group was formed and we were involved with that.

*MATTHEW:- This is the early 1970s is it?*

FIONA:- Yes, that's right. Julie Henry went to most of those meeting and spoke to the Senate. A Senate committee looked into this. She went along and gave NPA's opinions to this Senate committee. Then, finally, the matter went to court and we gave some money to help with that. Even when it was in court they were still working on the site on the top of the mountain and, of course, it was lost. PMG just won out on that one.

*MATTHEW:- A few years later, I think in the early 1980s, there was also a proposal to have some sort of tourist gondola constructed there as well.*

FIONA:- Yes. I think about the same time they were talking about putting one up on Uluru (*Ayers Rock*), but thank goodness they both didn't get very far.

*MATTHEW:- The Corin Forest ski area in the 1980s. That resulted in opposition from NPA. Were you involved in that?*

FIONA:- I wasn't involved in that. We went out and inspected the area, I remember, and there were letters to and from, but the Minister, was it Elliott at the time?

*MATTHEW:- Ellicott.*

FIONA:- Ellicott, yes Ellicott, he allowed that to happen but we did oppose it.

*MATTHEW:- We could move on now to issues that NPA has been involved in outside of the Terri-*



tory, for example, Kosciuszko, particularly the 1985 NPA Alps Conference. I think you were involved in helping to run that?

FIONA:- No.

MATTHEW:- You weren't?

Fiona:- No, I wasn't. But yes, because it's not far from the ACT and because we have alpine country, we have always been interested in what was happening in the Kosciuszko area and our committee, or certain members, have always made comment on any proposals and have been involved but I personally haven't. Once again, as a school teacher, it was impossible to just take days off to go and do something. Your school holidays are just set out for you and that's that, you can't take leave. Sadly no, I could never be involved in those sorts of issues if it needed you having to go and spend some days during the week somewhere.

MATTHEW:- Well, just from the point of view as a committee member who was aware of what was going on, can you tell me what some specific Kosciuszko management issues were that NPA has contributed to over the years. For example, ski development.

FIONA:- Yes, we have always protested every time the ski fields have been enlarged or the accommodation enlarged. Ideally, of course, all accommodation should be outside the park. That was our preference right from the start, but that wasn't to be. From the very beginning of the park they allowed resorts to grow up within the park and you can't turn back the clock. Tim Walsh, Di Thompson and Neville Esau have been very involved in the issue of the development in Perisher.

You are fighting big principalities and powers, I feel, in the Kossie [Kosciuszko] Park. It was set up in the first place, not for pure environmental reasons, it was set up for the Snowy Mountains Scheme, to keep the environment safe for the dams and so on. It wasn't set up just for the value of the place itself, if you see what I mean. It set off on the wrong foot as far as I'm concerned. It's a beautiful area but it's always been there for what commercially can be taken out of it, which is sad.

MATTHEW:- Thinking about other natural areas outside the ACT within the region, such as the Budawangs and then the coastal national parks, has the NPA traditionally shown a strong interest in management issues out there or has it always been on the periphery of NPA ACT's concerns?

FIONA:- Yes, I wouldn't say we have been strongly involved. We walk in the Budawangs and therefore, when we were asked to go in on some work parties, we felt we should. Di Thompson led the way with that.

MATTHEW:- That was in about 1989.

FIONA:- Yes. For a couple of years we went in and you had to walk a long way in. I mean, it's a lovely area, the Budawangs, in that it hasn't got roads through it and so to do anything you had to walk, perhaps walk half a day before you even got to the place where you were going to work.

MATTHEW:- Can you tell me the sort of work that you did.

FIONA:- It was track work from the Wog-Wog area beneath Mt Corang where the track was very boggy. That was an area that we worked in putting railway sleepers in to try and divert the water and so on.

MATTHEW:- Were there many NPA members on these work parties?

FIONA:- Yes, I suppose there must have been about 14 people on some of them and, as I said, it was quite an effort because you had to walk in and carry your tools. They had dropped in, by helicopter, the sleepers but then they had to be carried and set in and so on. It was heavy work.

MATTHEW:- So the Parks Service had arranged helicopter transport.



FIONA:- Yes, yes.

*MATTHEW:- And was it a good working relationship with the NSW Parks Service?*

FIONA:- Yes, the ranger who was based at Braidwood was easy to get on with. To my memory, that's about the only involvement we've had. We've made comment, of course, on issues but our greatest concern has always been with our own ACT or with the Kosciuszko area, that would be the next because it was really part of our area. Also there is that difficulty of we're the ACT and here we are telling NSW what to do and that's not always acceptable, by some officials. They don't like that at all but, I think, an issue that has involved all Australians, you know in the east anyway, is the forest issue and we certainly have written letters and some of our members have joined protests about the logging of our forests.

*MATTHEW:- The south-east forests?*

FIONA:- Yes, and Tasmania and Victoria.

*MATTHEW:- Just to go back to another issue, certainly within Namadgi and it's related to Kosciuszko too, and that's the issue of grazing. It would seem that, as you said earlier, the original proposal by NPA didn't want to see graziers dispossessed in what has become Namadgi, but they have been over time anyway.*

FIONA:- Well, I don't think we were being kind to graziers in particular; it was just that we knew that if you asked for freehold land, money has to be spent and we didn't want to ask for something that sounded expensive. That was our thinking at the time, but in reality the Department itself stepped in to repossess those valleys and to our great surprise the Cotter catchment was included. You see, that was always, "no, no, you can't camp there, you can't go there and so on" so that was beyond our expectations. Yes, it's been expanded but as a principle you can't have grazing. I mean you do in Europe, you have multiple use, but in Australia the tradition of use of the land by grazing is only 150 years old. I think, you could reverse it here, but you couldn't do that in those very old communities of Europe. There were a few people who felt we should allow the grazing to continue: some of our members, but they were a minority who didn't like to see the Gudgenby valley without its cattle. But really when you think about it, they're not compatible, a national park is there for native animals not for ferals.

*MATTHEW:- Did you have a good relationship with the graziers in the 1970s prior to the declaration of Gudgenby? I'm thinking of the Gregorys at Orroral or Bootes at Gudgenby or Lutons down at Boboyan. Was there much intercourse with them?*

FIONA:- No, nobody but the Bootes at Gudgenby. Mr Bootes was the only person that we really contacted and that was because we used to have to ask his permission to cross his paddocks if we wanted to walk up Middle Creek or get into the mountains. He always allowed us to, and occasionally he would even let us drive up to his far boundary. He didn't mind as long as we didn't disturb his cattle. Now he was a very nice man and, I suppose, in a way that's why some members felt really he shouldn't be pushed out until he died and then not pass it on. In reality he was moved out.

*MATTHEW:- So, was there pretty good access for walking, anyway, prior to the declaration of the nature reserve?*

FIONA:- Most of our walks were just day walks and those walks were up to Nursery Swamp, that was quite a popular one, or just up the Orroral Valley or walks up off the Brindabella Road when that was all Crown or Forestry land. We didn't walk in the Mt Clear area until that was included in the national park. We weren't able to really explore the Gudgenby valley until the Bootes family had gone, I mean we had always just scuttled across, you know, as quickly as we could. So that did open up a bigger area for us to do walks, day walks, by allowing us freely to walk those valleys. The Boboyan valley, once again, that was leasehold to the Luton family, wasn't it, and I



don't think we were ever denied access to walk through, but you walked through it into the mountains. You didn't camp in the valley in those early days. But I must emphasise that there was very little pack walking until well into the 1970s, when a group did arise with leaders like Reg Alder and Neville Esau and so on who were willing to backpack.

*MATTHEW:- And Phil Gatenby?*

FIONA:- Well, he came later. It's always been a minority group within the NPA of people who will actually go and backpack.

*MATTHEW:- OK. Can we talk now a bit more about the actual work that NPA members have done within Namadgi and elsewhere. You mentioned earlier the track work in the Budawangs and we touched on the Orroral homestead conservation program. I would like to hear more about Orroral and, of course, that took quite a long time, didn't it?*

FIONA:- Oh yes, that was a big project. We started enthusiastically, as I say, when Ross Carlton was President. We were given permission to clear out the house as they had been storing hay within it. Then there was a little archaeological dig and so on, and it was realised what work was involved. Then, of course, bureaucracy stepped in and you had to make proposals and draw up plans, and we were stymied for about ten years. In that ten years the place deteriorated. It had just been caught in time when Ross saw it, but in that ten years one of the walls started to fall out and the corners posts were rotting and the old kitchen area became even more derelict. Really that was a very frustrating project, getting the different government departments, the heritage group to pull with the other group. Lots of obstacles were placed in our way...

*MATTHEW:- Can you see that there was reason or the need to take time?*

FIONA:- No, there was no reason. It was procrastination and inept behaviour as far as I'm concerned and it was only through the tenacity of Reg Alder that it was ever done, I feel. People were willing, I mean we were always able to get a group together to work, but it was to be able to work, that was the problem. Then finally, as more and more constrictions on anybody's work were placed on us, they had to get a qualified carpenter to do much of the work. We were the helpers then. It was wonderful to see it done, and I'm so pleased it was because it's a beautiful old building and you know, it's a reminder of our European heritage within the national park.

*MATTHEW:- And you think NPA did a good job on that project?*

FIONA:- Oh excellent. Kosciuszko Huts [Association] helped to an extent but, of course, they've always got their hands full with all the other huts they had to look after. They had taken the lead with Brayshaws and Westermans [homesteads] and so on. Their work has been wonderful in getting that done.

*MATTHEW:- So far the picture of the Parks Service and I guess the Heritage Unit hasn't been coming across as a very good one, but there were some good working relationships?*

FIONA:- Well, if I start backwards, in these most recent years I think we are friends. I think we realise that we both need each other very much so I think the Department, the rangers and so on, realise that we are useful people and that we are a good pressure group to have, but that wasn't always so. I think we were resented as being interfering. I won't mention names of the chief rangers. There was a stage where we were resented and we weren't helped and Orroral came in that time; trying to get Orroral finished came within that time.

Reg Alder will tell you how difficult it was to get the Yerrabi Track built, for no apparent reason. Why not, I mean it encourages people out into the bush, it made a track that most people could walk and look into the whole of the park. It's a very stunning walk to do, but it was very hard to get permission to do that and very little help from the rangers. They resented us doing it.

*MATTHEW:- Some other projects that NPA has been involved with include the tree planting at*



*Glendale led by Charles Hill in 1983, now were you involved in that?*

FIONA:- Yes, we were all involved with that.

*MATTHEW:- That was the International Year of the Tree, I believe.*

FIONA:- Well it was a lovely project in the way that it started with collecting seeds, and people looking after the little plants in their milk cartons and so on. It's a niggling thought, but the site we were given to plant was a very poor site, and I wonder if that was deliberate.

*MATTHEW:- Have many of those trees survived?*

FIONA:- No! It was the site that had, we have realised since, had probably been used as a road dump or something. It's right by the creek, but very cold. The poor little plants struggled and a lot of them were eaten by insects. Four hundred I think we planted out or something like that, but very few have survived.

*MATTHEW:- And that site is actually heading towards [where] the Glendale ranger building was, where the picnic area is now.*

FIONA:- Yes.

*MATTHEW:- It's on your right, just before you get to the picnic area?*

FIONA:- Yes, there used to be a building there and there are toilets there still. That was in the time when we were just tolerated, and I just sometimes wonder whether they couldn't have found us a better site or whether that was deliberate.

*MATTHEW:- Now the 1983 bushfire was a huge one. How did you feel personally when that fire went through your nature reserve?*

FIONA:- Well, it was horrifying, but it was a natural disaster. I'm of the philosophy, I'm against control burning because I think it's too frequent. It might preserve the trees because it's usually foresters who advocate control burning, but we don't know what terrible damage it does to insect populations and reptiles and so on. You know, if you keep burning an area every five years or ten years, that's unnatural. We had a talk once by a forestry fellow and he said that through core samples and looking through the swamps, looking at soil samples, they thought that there was probably a big fire every 50 years in the mountains. So these huge natural disasters occurred every 50 years and the bush could recover, but it can't recover if you burn frequently. I felt that this was just one of these big natural 50 year disasters. We had had years of drought and the bush was tinder dry. Tremendous wind came up and blew and blew and there was no way, even if you had control burnt it, it would have stopped that fire. It just roared through.

*MATTHEW:- And was NPA able to play much of a role?*

FIONA:- Well, we weren't allowed to go out and fight the fire. That was taboo, you had to belong to the right services for that. I know Reg [Alder] and I went over to Dickson for several nights and joined a team of people who were making steak sandwiches and so on to be sent out to the firefighters, and that was about all we were allowed to do. Well that was useful, just to be on the edge but I can understand that you need to know what you are doing.

*MATTHEW:- So the steak sandwiches were made here in town and taken out to Gudgenby?*

FIONA:- Yes, that's right. That was the community services, the emergency services, just a couple of women and they called on volunteers to go, so probably lots of other groups sent in people. I can remember that; a couple of nights spent over there making steak sandwiches, so that was all and the rest of it you just had to see the smoke in the sky. It's very painful. I find droughts painful and bushfires because you just feel for all the animals in the bush.

*MATTHEW:- Now there were quite a few fire trails bulldozed in order to fight that fire and the one*



through to Nursery Swamp was revegetated by NPA work parties and you played a leading role there.

FIONA:- Yes. Well, we went out after the fire was over and just looked at the scorched earth and then met the ranger, Peter Hann. I'm saying we, it was Reg [Alder] and myself, we just went out to look. I said to Peter, "Is there anything we can do?" and he came up with the idea. He said, "Oh yes, that fire trail, we don't want that to stay there". They had bulldozed it straight up a hillside and up to the lovely swamp area and further on to right down to the Rendezvous Creek, and so he said, "Yes, I'd like it revegetated". I rang around and called up people and we had a wonderful response. I think everyone felt they wanted to do something, and we worked on that. We were given grass seed that was sterile so that it would just hold the earth until, hopefully, native vegetation came back, and we worked on it for several Saturdays. People then knew of the area that was there where we were working, and that's when it became a popular place to walk. The fire trail quickly recovered but there's still that walking track in the middle of this very wide trail. We also dragged logs across and so on. Everyone was happy to do that. It was something you could do, but it was the only bit of restoration that we did after the fire.

MATTHEW:- *What about other track work, for example, and I'll be talking with Reg about the Yer-rabi Track, but the work on the Orroral Valley track and the end of the Alps Track. Have you been involved in those?*

FIONA:- Yes, that was Syd Comfort. We worked on Mount Tennent, on that track for a couple of Saturdays.

MATTHEW:- *And what sort of work was involved there?*

FIONA:- Well, that's very steep and the track needed to be zigzagged really. It was just a matter of scraping the earth and putting in pieces of wood across the track, so that the water wouldn't just run straight down, to make the runoffs. I found that heavy work really, because you were working on that very unstable earth, rocky earth, and it was so steep.

MATTHEW:- *That was the early 1990s, was it?*

FIONA:- Yes.

MATTHEW:- *And were they big work parties? Was there much of a show of support for NPA for that?*

FIONA:- Yes, you'd get a dozen people who would turn out for that. We have had lots of work parties that Len Haskew has arranged over the years, within the park itself, the Gudgenby valley, to try and get rid of the briars and the wildlings.

MATTHEW:- *The pines?*

FIONA:- Yes, the pine wildlings and track making there, but you would have heard about there when you spoke to Len. I hope he spoke about that. For several years he was the one who had to liaise with the rangers. That was a problem sometimes, because you would have to order material, you see, and it wasn't always available, so we would turn up for a work party and couldn't do it. I'm afraid numbers do drop off once that happens, people give up a weekend to do that but couldn't do it. So there were some frustrations to track making when you are actually making the wooden tracks.

MATTHEW:- *Is that the track in the Orroral Valley that you are referring to?*

FIONA:- Yes, it's very necessary and good to have it, but there were some problems with that one.

MATTHEW:- *OK. Perhaps we could go on to the Outings Program which is the other side of the NPA. I mean on one side it's an advocate for conservation and looking after the national park but*



*on the other side, it is a bushwalking group. You have mentioned a couple of comments already about the walks over the years and you were on the Outings Sub-committee for quite a while yourself.*

FIONA:- Yes.

*MATTHEW:- Did you have any particular philosophy yourself as a walks leader, in what you were trying to do in leading walks? Or was it just, "let's have a walk"?*

FIONA:- Well, because it's your park you want to get to know it as best you can. Your park. I mean, I am very possessive about Namadgi National Park, I must admit. It's been such a privilege to have been involved right at the beginning when I was still a young person in my 20s, so I feel very possessive of it. So it's been lovely to be able to go out and walk most of it while you still had the strength of leg. I think people who join the NPA, most people who join the NPA, do it because they want to get out in the bush. They enjoy walking, they enjoy being out in the bush. Most people do not join it because they are very worried about the environment. You hope that by their contact with the bush and seeing the issues and seeing the problems, that they will become concerned and join the committee and so on, but it's only a very small minority who really become environmentalists, I think. Most people are members because they just like being out in the bush and like walking.

*MATTHEW:- Can you tell me about some of the favourite places that you have led people to?*

FIONA:- Well, I haven't been a wonderful leader. My walks, as leader, were down the coast to Pebbly Beach, and I lead an annual walk out to Micalong Creek, that area, in the summer because I'm very fond of the water and swimming. That's become quite usual, every February I lead that walk out there. One of the good things about that one is it's very easy and relaxing and so you hope you'll get some beginners and new people. You can get family groups out on that one.

*MATTHEW:- Is that a car camp on Micalong Creek or do you walk down to the Goodradigbee?*

FIONA:- We walk down to the Goodradigbee. Yes, it's only a three quarters of an hour walk and then we set up camp and swim. Yes, it's a very relaxed and easy time, but it's very nice for those involved.

*MATTHEW:- And what other places?*

FIONA:- Well, leading walks as I say, I haven't led a lot of walks but the places I've loved to walk in, of course, have been up to Mount Kelly and Namadgi. They would be my favourite areas.

*MATTHEW:- Namadgi peak itself?*

FIONA:- Yes, my favourite areas in the park.

*MATTHEW:- Do you think there has been much of a change in walker numbers in NPA trips over the years?*

FIONA:- It fluctuates a lot. In the early days, we used to get a lot of people out. I can remember one walk led by Professor Brown out to Yass, a very interesting geology trip. He was a professor for geology at ANU. It was looking at the 'Shearsby's Wallpaper' and all those, you know, uplifts and so on out there, and we had 70 people which was really too many. Also, of course, Canberra was still a fairly small place and you didn't have a lot of groups that people could join, but now you've got other walking groups, and people seem to go out a lot just in private groups as there are books written about walks and so on. I think numbers fluctuate because unless it's a new area you are going to, people aren't interested.

*MATTHEW:- NPA no longer has the monopoly that it once did.*

FIONA:- No, not at all. But that doesn't really concern me because I feel that our primary reason



for being is as a lobby group not to provide entertainment for people. You have to provide entertainment to keep people as members, I know, but really our real purpose is to be a lobby group.

*MATTHEW:- Do you think, in that regard both as a lobby group and as a walking group to introduce people to the ACT bush, the NPA has been successful over the years?*

FIONA:- Oh, I think it has been successful. I mean, it's limited in that we are all volunteers and it's only within the last quarter of our existence that we have had grants of money to pay for secretarial help and help in proposals and so on. So much is demanded now of people within their own workplace, and all the paper work that is needed. No longer can you just write a letter and that's sufficient, you have to have pages and pages of justification and so on, on any issue whatsoever and that makes a tremendous load, I think, for volunteer groups. So I think, to the best of our ability we have been a very useful group and I hope we will continue to be a useful group. You are always worried about keeping up the membership and it would seem we haven't really. We started off with about 250 people. I was membership secretary for a few years and kept the card system before the days of computers. We were about 250 and I suppose we are really about 350 now in that whole 40 years.

*MATTHEW:- In the 1980s it was quite a bit higher wasn't it?*

FIONA:- Well, so it was said but I think, I mean that 350, then you have to have couples, so in actual people you might have 500. There are so many other groups these days as well. There's the ACF and the Wilderness Society and all sorts of just local groups too, and other walking groups that I think it's been alright to maintain our numbers. NSW has thousands but then it's got a huge population.

*MATTHEW:- OK. Another important part of the NPA's activities over the years has, of course, been the Bulletin and we mentioned earlier how you were an editor for quite a while, I think, from 1965 to 72, or something like that?*

FIONA:- Yes.

*MATTHEW:- And you've been on the Bulletin committee at other times. What do you think have been the major changes in the Bulletin. I notice that, for example, photos only started to appear in about 1974.*

FIONA:- Yes, well it was always cost I suppose, it was a constraint and we just felt it was an information sheet in a way. But in the 1970s, Reg [Alder] brought in the idea of photographs and that's been carried on. I think the *Bulletin* now is quite a work of art, a lovely presentation through modern technology as well as some very dedicated editors.

*MATTHEW:- When you were editor did you pick and choose between contributions or were you always pleased just to get anything?*

FIONA:- Oh, I had very few. As I say, I wrote a lot of it myself or took pieces out of other publications. Yes, it was only a very small thing really, when I was editor. It was after that that it began to expand and people gave in articles and so on. Mine was a very small publication. It was necessary but it was, you know, small.

*MATTHEW:- Still, you've kept in touch with it for a good while and I think you were on the committee that were advising Roger Green when he took it over and it became a commercial proposition in 1989.*

FIONA:- Yes. Well, I think that was a good step too, because the layout began to improve and the type and now at last the pictures, we've finally got the pictures right. It was felt, too, that we should be educating the departments and schools, so that its distribution is way beyond our membership, and that's a very good thing.

*MATTHEW:- And of course, there have been other publications that NPA has put out over the*





years. The first one was Mountain Slopes and Plains in 1971 which the Department of the Interior published on your behalf.

FIONA:- Yes.

MATTHEW:- Were you involved in that?

FIONA:- No, that was Nancy [Burbidge], Nancy again. She was the one who produced that and it's a lovely little publication. I'm sorry that it won't ever be reproduced.

MATTHEW:- And what was its function? Just to get the word out to people about what was in the ACT?

FIONA:- Yes. Just a general description really of all the variety to be found in the ACT now.

MATTHEW:- Have you played a role in any of the other publications? There was Rambles around Canberra by Mortlock and O'Loughlin.

FIONA:- No, I haven't been involved in that at all.

MATTHEW:- Or the tree guide?

FIONA:- No, I wasn't involved in any of those. The trees, Babette Scougall was involved with that. We have been fortunate to have botanists within our group who were very involved with that and that's been a successful publication. Then the birds was a very necessary book and, of course, was through the generosity of Alastair [Morrison] that we've been able to produce that. And the reptiles one.

MATTHEW:- All right, the general meetings, the monthly meetings that the NPA has had since the year dot. Now, of course, the venue for those certainly has changed over the years. Originally they were at the Institute of Anatomy. What was it like meeting there because I never knew that building, for example?

FIONA:- Well, it was comfortable, the seats were soft and comfortable. But certainly your speaker and President and Secretary had to sit up on a stage which did separate them from the mob, I suppose. There was a little kitchen. I have always been involved with getting the supper and washing up, that seems to have been my most constant role. So all the facilities were there and it was free, I don't think we had to pay. Canberra was small in those days and that was a central place to have it. Then we moved to the Griffin Centre.

MATTHEW:- That was in about 1969 I think?

FIONA:- Was it, well I had forgotten when it was. That's been satisfactory to a certain extent. I mean a dreadful place to show films and slides.

MATTHEW:- Because of the light coming in from outside?

FIONA:- Yes. The one thing about the Institute was that in our early meetings we often did have films, old films that we borrowed from the Film Library, and there you have a little projection room and so on and the lights do go out and it is black whereas at the Griffin Centre it's always ....[End of tape]

MATTHEW:- You were just saying that at the Griffin Centre, peoples' slides always looked second best because of the light problem.

FIONA:- Yes.

MATTHEW:- And was that a reason for moving on to Forestry House in 1998 or were there other factors?

FIONA:- Oh, I think what some people said about the Griffin Centre, you know, was that the area wasn't quite so savoury as it had been. Not that that ever worried me and for me, of course, it's



very handy more so than at the Forestry School. That's very comfortable over there and it's quieter, you know; Civic has become noisier at night. I think our numbers are just maintaining themselves; they might have fallen off a little bit but there are all sorts of factors as to why people won't come to meetings.

*MATTHEW:- What would the numbers have been like in say the 1960s and 70s? Similar to what we have, 30-40 people?*

FIONA:- Yes, they were slightly bigger than they are now. Yes, they would have been about 40 plus whereas now we often only get 20 something.

*MATTHEW:- I notice that, as we were saying earlier, you did get some pretty high profile speakers like Judith Wright and Milo Dunphy and others and that seemed to be there was a special annual meeting each year for the public as well, say in the Canberra Theatre or somewhere like that.*

FIONA:- Yes. That was in the Old Playhouse. We had Judith Wright and we paid her fare down and put her in a hotel. It cost us something to do that but it was felt that that might interest the public and we did get good attendance, a few hundred people. We put an ad in the paper for those. That series went on for about eight people; eight years I think. We did run a couple of seminars, as I said; one at the CSIRO at Campbell, an all day seminar, and another one about the alpine track, the whole alpine issues, at the John Curtin School, in one of those buildings there.

*MATTHEW:- When would that have been roughly?*

FIONA:- It was probably in the early 1980s, I can't quite remember, but we did get good response from that one. I would just like to go back to our first poster competition because being the first, I think it was the most successful. I was still Secretary then and Sandy [Brand] was publicity officer. We sent out notices to all the primary schools and high schools in the ACT and got tremendous response. It meant organising people to pick up from all these places and a lot of our members, who weren't on committees, stepped in and did that. Then we asked the art teacher at Canberra High [School] to be our judge, and so one Saturday we spread out all the entries, you know we got thousands, in some of the space up there in the old Canberra High building.

*MATTHEW:- And who was that art teacher, do you know?*

FIONA:- I can't remember her name, so she had this dreadful task, you know, of choosing for different categories. We got some really beautiful outstanding posters from the Roman Catholic Girls School area in Braddon, they must have had a wonderful art teacher. The most imaginative, beautiful posters. It must have been one of the first poster competitions, I think, in the ACT.

*MATTHEW:- And when was this, about 1970-71?*

FIONA:- Well no, it was in the 1960s; I can't remember what time in the 1960s but it was in the 1960s. TV had just sort of really come to Canberra and so I arranged with Channel 7 to interview our Publicity Officer and asked if we could have the presentation of prizes on TV and that happened. Because I was in the planning and running of that it stands out in my mind as a highly successful thing. Then we displayed the posters in Civic on stands and in a couple of places and so on.

*MATTHEW:- And did NPA say, "Right the theme of these posters has to be ride to the bush or conservation"? Or what sort of guidance or parameters were set out by NPA? I guess there was a message there, conservation message?*

FIONA:- Yes, I don't think we've got the flyers in our archives. We printed out coloured flyers, you know, on the old butchers' paper sort of thing. I think there was sort of a theme for each



section, for the high school section and upper primary and lower primary, I think we had those sort of three categories, but it would be protect native animals. I mean the kids wrote a slogan, like protect native animals or don't pick the flowers or something. They wrote messages on all their posters.

*MATTHEW:- Another thing that NPA did for a number of years was to put up a display during Heritage Week in the Albert Hall.*

FIONA:- Yes, but I wasn't involved in that. I would go and help mind it, but I wasn't in the planning of that. That was Ann Robertson, and Adrienne Nicholson has been involved, and Glyn.

*MATTHEW:- Glyn Lewis?*

FIONA:- Yes, Glyn Lewis.

*MATTHEW:- And Glyn Lewis, I think put together an audio-visual display during the 1970s too. Do you recall that?*

FIONA:- No, not in particular, I can't remember that, but that's been our outreach really to always be a presence, and we still go to the Canberra Day and ACT Alive.

*MATTHEW:- Do you find the numbers of people who are coming up to the stall at ACT Alive today are greater or lesser or about the same as say some of those Albert Hall displays over a decade ago?*

FIONA:- About the same. You know, there are a certain group of people who are interested in the environment and it always will be so, I think. Just as some people are interested in car racing, why I don't know, but they are. You know, I think you've just got that section who are very interested and will stop and look and read about it but you hope that those others who aren't all that interested, at least just seeing you there will register and perhaps if a big environmental issue comes up they know that there are people who think that way. That might be a faint hope, but you just hope that in some way you do penetrate beyond the converted.

*MATTHEW:- Your own work in all this area has been recognised, an Order of Australia, I think, in 1995 and a Life Member of NPA in 1982 and you must have been rather pleased to receive that recognition?*

FIONA:- Yes, well I felt honoured to become a Life Member of NPA because it's one of those things that I get quite emotional about, but you just felt you couldn't have done otherwise, you're so committed. I couldn't have lived any other way, and to be recognised was pretty special. To get the award, the Order of Australia award, I was a bit ....., I mean I'm a Republican and so I'm always a bit doubtful about these honours, but in the long run I felt it is an honour to get it because at last the environment is being recognised as being respectable.

We're not ratbags, we're not the ratbag fringe, as we have been for so long, and I felt well, the Establishment is recognising it. It was good to stand out there in Government House. It wasn't Mr Hayden, it was Mr Sinclair who was the NSW Governor, who really did his homework and read about every person. I admired him so much and he asked me about the National Park and I was able to say it took 17 years and we got it through Tom Uren. I was able to say all those things in public and I just felt that was very good for the movement itself, to have that recognition.

*MATTHEW:- And you've also been involved with the Labor Party over many years and with the party's Environment Committee. Is that correct?*

FIONA:- Yes, but not all that influential there. Yes, while Bill Wood was Minister, I was on that committee, but most of their environmental concerns are within the city. It's very hard to push the interest beyond the city, I mean most of them didn't even know where Tharwa was, but I was able to bring up a few issues. I am no longer on the Environmental Committee because it's just become more and more just how the city is developing. They're not really looking beyond the



city. I feel that in the political regime at the moment it's very hard when you are in opposition to push your issues, anyway.

*MATTHEW:- OK, well we're getting really to the end of the questions I was going to ask. What do you think Namadgi has given you?*

FIONA:- Oh a lifetime, a lifetime of joy, I think. You know, I just think it's such a beautiful area and even though I can't do the big walks any more, it's just lovely to drive out there and sit and look at it or just do strolls here and there within it. I think it sets a great example for the whole of our nation to think that half the ACT is a national park. Most of the States don't want to learn from the National Capital, I know, but I think that. Sadly, a lot of Canberra people don't know it's there still or don't know of its size, so we still have a lot of educating to do.

*MATTHEW:- Well all right, that's just about at the end of the questions I have in mind. You've got some notes there. Have we covered all of that or would you like to make some further comments?*

FIONA:- No, I think you've covered it all, Matthew, very well. Yes.

*MATTHEW:- You're happy to stop there?*

FIONA:- Yes, I'm happy to stop.

*MATTHEW:- Well, thanks very much for your time, Fiona.*