



INTERVIEW WITH ELEANOR STODART

(NPA President 1995-96)

MATTHEW:- This is a tape of an interview by Matthew Higgins with Eleanor Stodart for the National Parks Association ACT Oral History Project, taking place in Eleanor's home in Canberra on 23rd December 1999.

Eleanor, thanks very much for agreeing to be interviewed for the project. I'm looking forward to hearing some of your memories and comments about your time with NPA.

Just to begin with briefly: you were born in Sydney in 1940 and studied zoology and botany at Sydney University and came to Canberra to work in the CSIRO Wildlife area in 1962. Then subsequently after your family, there was other part-time work and working as a demonstrator at the ANU and you have been writing nature study books also for children, 22, I think, since 1972. So already well before you joined NPA in 1994 there was quite an emphasis in nature and I guess the outdoors in your life.

ELEANOR:- Yes, well always since I was a child; that's why I did botany and zoology. When I came to Canberra one of the first things I did was join the Canberra Bushwalking Club. I was very active bushwalking for the first few years until I had young children and found it was just too much effort to plan to leave them for the weekend and go off walking, and so I dropped out.

MATTHEW:- That was well before Gudgenby Nature Reserve came into being; it would have been in the 1960s?

ELEANOR:- Yes, it would have been the summer of 1962/63 that I started doing that.

MATTHEW:- Can you tell me some of the walk locations that you visited at that time?

ELEANOR:- Well, we went up in the Snowy Mountains; I remember going to Blue Lake, and we tried to go to Mt Kelly. I remember one weekend doing that, I think it was a June long weekend in 1963, and it snowed, just a light fall of snow, but because there was snow on the trees it was very wet walking through them, and so we got absolutely saturated. So we came out early, we actually came out after dark on the Sunday night and visited Gudgenby Homestead and the Bootes were really very welcoming. We thought we ought to tell them we were going to take the cars and they offered us cups of tea and we sat by the fire and ended up sleeping in their shearer's quarters under fox-skin rugs. So that was my first introduction to Gudgenby. I can't remember particularly other walks at that time, but quite a lot in the Snowy Mountains.

MATTHEW:- So you were certainly getting to know the high country and other areas round about from that date.

ELEANOR:- Yes, and skiing too.

MATTHEW:- Cross country skiing?

ELEANOR:- Both, at that stage we used to use the same skis but we just had heel release bindings. I think my first ski tour was actually from Bulls Head to the Franklin Chalet which was after some university student had got caught in there

MATTHEW:- That was in 1964 that they got caught?

ELEANOR:- with heavy snowfalls, and we did a ski tour in there. Another early one was going to Whites River [hut] from Guthega. We were very fortunate we had a good batch of people who were interested in doing that sort of thing in the Canberra Bushwalking Club. I also got involved with the YMCA Ski Club too.

MATTHEW:- Were you a member of the YMCA Ski Club?



ELEANOR:- Yes, I still am, it's now the Brindabella Ski Club.

MATTHEW:- *You actually joined the NPA in 1994, but I guess you were well aware of it prior to that time?*

ELEANOR:- Yes, we knew the Storys [*Bob & Sybil*] through the Canberra Bushwalking Club and I knew what was happening with the lobbying to form the national park. I knew something of what was happening anyway, but I was busy doing other things.

MATTHEW:- *As a member of the Canberra Bushwalkers do you know whether that organisation played much of a role in campaigning for a national park [in the ACT]?*

ELEANOR:- Well, I certainly don't think it did much, at the time I was active in it anyway. What we did get a bit involved in was with the Kosciuszko National Park. I remember looking at, I think, it must have been plans for a wilderness area there and working a bit on that, but actually I don't know whether that was sort of officially as a Canberra Bushwalking Club activity or not.

MATTHEW:- *How was it that you came to join NPA in 1994?*

ELEANOR:- Well, a couple of years before that my husband had died and my children had grown up, and I'd sort of let slip some of the work I'd been doing for CSIRO and I needed an activity. I realised the last few holidays that I'd had were all in national parks. I'd been to Mt Kaputar, the Warrumbungles, the Macquarie Marshes, Myall Lakes and, of course, Kosciuszko, because I go skiing almost every year. I thought I really would like to do something to contribute towards making sure that these are still around and well run for people to use, so that was the reason I joined and why I offered to go on the Committee.

MATTHEW:- *Just before we talk about your involvement on the committee, you were outside of NPA at the time Gudgenby Nature Reserve came into being in 1979 and Namadgi National Park in 1984. What was your personal reaction when those announcements were made?*

ELEANOR:- Well, actually I can't remember, I was busy with a young family. I'm sure I was pleased that it had happened but I can't really remember particularly taken by it. I certainly would have been horrified if there had been other developments there.

MATTHEW:- *Now very soon after joining the NPA, well within a year, you were Vice-president and then the following year in 1995 the President and you were at that senior level for a couple of years through to 1997. Can you talk to me for a little while about some of the major issues, say in regard to Namadgi, you dealt with during that time?*

ELEANOR:- Well, the very first one was the Liberal Government had just taken over from a Labor Government in the ACT and they were looking at everything that they were looking after; different ways of managing things and they started looking at whether they could lease out the management (I suppose leasing is not the right term but outsourcing anyway) of Namadgi through NSW Wildlife Service or else through the Commonwealth Government.

MATTHEW:- *Australian National Parks & Wildlife Service?*

ELEANOR:- Yes, but they keep changing these names. I forget what it was called then. Yes, that was the first issue that came up.

MATTHEW:- *Did you have meetings with Gary Humphries, the Minister, regarding that?*

ELEANOR:- Yes, we immediately put out a press release, I mean this was my first experience lobbying or meeting politicians for anything. Yes, so it was quite interesting.

MATTHEW:- *And what was the reception like for NPA at that ministerial level, both initially and as things developed?*

ELEANOR:- Well initially, I guess, it was a bit nervous but obviously our point of view held the



day; I mean they hadn't committed themselves to doing anything like that, they were just looking at it and possibly they may not have anyway. I think it would have been a very silly idea because NSW Parks & Wildlife Service would have given the ACT a fairly low priority. I suppose in some ways it would have put our rangers as part of a larger service and perhaps better variety of work, but there wouldn't have been the commitment to the ACT area and we would have had very little influence over what was happening. I think we are very fortunate in the ACT that the Government recognises that people are able to lobby and put their views forward and we do have some effect on what they do. I'm quite sure we would not have had any effect if we had had to go through a NSW organisation.

MATTHEW:- Can you tell me about other issues that came up in regard to Namadgi during those couple of years?

ELEANOR:- What came up next, well, the Boboyan pines area in Namadgi, the NPA had always hoped that that area would be removed, and in the management plan it does suggest that the pines should be removed but doesn't give any time scale or anything on that. Really before I got on the Committee they had commissioned a report from Nicki Taws about how the area should be regenerated, which was done to sort of provide a bit of impetus towards getting Parks & Conservation to do something about it. As I said, I wasn't part of initiating it but it was completed at the time when I was President and that, of course, led to quite a lot of other things. In fact, I think, in producing that report, NPA was quite effective in doing that.

MATTHEW:- So that the very production of that report helped the ball rolling to have the pines removed and the area regenerated in due course?

ELEANOR:- I think it did, the timing certainly suggests it did. We really don't know what is going on behind the scenes in Government departments always, but the timing of it and what happened next certainly suggests that it was quite effective.

MATTHEW:- Now, I know that you have been very involved personally recently with the subsequent work on the ground there, the Gudgenby Bush Regeneration Group (GBRG), I know that's not specifically an NPA group, but obviously there is a lot of influence from NPA. Can you tell me about that and the work that is being done in the course of events?

ELEANOR:- Well, NPA looked at that. We knew the Parks Service wanted to have a community organisation to do work parties and NPA could have offered to do it, and we considered that but decided it was better to start a separate organisation. Obviously a large number of the active members in this are NPA members, in fact, nearly all the committee are NPA members. I think it was a good thing to have a separate organisation because quite a number of other people have come in that way and worked through that. So that was formed in May 1998 and hasn't been going very long. The timing for its actual formation was then because that was after the first batch of pines had been felled about 18 months before, but they have to lie on the ground long enough for the leaves to dry out, enough to get a good hot burn. So we didn't form that group until the area was just about ready for work on planting, seeding, etc.

MATTHEW:- And how has the work actually proceeded, who has provided the seed, the Eucalyptus seed?

ELEANOR:- Well, Parks and Conservation started off with quite a vote of money for the project and they collected a lot of seed, something like \$30,000 worth of money they spent on a contractor to collect seed from mainly three species of eucalypts plus two others at a smaller level and wattle, acacias, so it's all the over-storey type of plants that they are dealing with. They had Ann Connelly then as a project manager who did a very, very good job of coordinating Forestry and Parks and Conservation and also getting the community group started.

MATTHEW:- And that work has since been taken on by Steve Welsh?



ELEANOR:- Yes, well he hasn't had nearly such a good go at it as Ann Connelly, because shortly after he took over the position he lost it as a dedicated project manager, it became an extra duty on top of his normal range of duties; so he was very much extended. Last year NPA lobbied for more money for the project because although they had voted \$400,000 for it they only spent part of that and (the ACT Government) withdrew the rest. That's why the project manager's position disappeared for a year, well, as I said, as a dedicated position. Fortunately, Ann Connelly had done enough groundwork, they had collected the seeds, and with the formation of the Gudgenby Bush Regeneration Group the project did continue. Then we pressured Government for putting some funds towards it. They did use a little bit of 'Landcare' money so there was some funding going right through. Last year then, Steve has the position as a dedicated manager just for 6 months which is getting us over this summer.

MATTHEW:- Was there ever any explanation by the ACT Government as to why so much of the funding was taken away?

ELEANOR:- I don't think so, but they always claim there is pressure for money for other things that they are doing like hospitals, schools and what-have-you.

MATTHEW:- The seed was collected and then where was it germinated? I assume you have been planting seedlings out there.

ELEANOR:- Mostly we have been planting seed. Initially what we did was we scraped and put the seed in scrapes in little patches. We also tried an area where we broadcast the seed. Because the seed is very, very fine we mixed it with sand, otherwise you just couldn't do it lightly enough and would be wasting an awful lot of seed; so we mix it with sand and scatter that. We actually have found that the broadcast areas have done better, there is a more even spread of seedlings and there seems to be a greater amount of germination. So this is what is happening now. The area that was burnt this year, last winter, was all broadcast seed. That is also much better because you can cover a much bigger area if you are walking around broadcasting it. We have a little concrete mixer which mixes the sand and seed in together, and then you take buckets of this mixture and just walk around broadcasting it, so you can cover a bigger area than using a tool to scrape the surface. Once you get ground cover growing, of course, you have to scrape the surface, so this broadcasting is very effective immediately after the fire. This last year Steve Welsh made sure it was done within a few days of the fire, trying to get the chemical reaction from the ash to improve the rate of germination because it was a bit erratic, last year's seeding, the germination seems to be a bit erratic. We are also doing planting too to fill in the gaps.

MATTHEW:- The whole point to this is to re-establish a forest which is as close as can be known to the existing forest, the native forest?

ELEANOR:- Yes. Because the area where the pines were had been cleared for grazing there aren't really very clear records of how much of that area was tree covered. I imagine some of that low lying area next to Bogong Swamp could well have been a frost hollow but we just don't know how much. We are not going to recreate a really natural area but we are going to do the best we can.

MATTHEW:- Try to avoid it becoming the ACT's biggest thistle patch.

ELEANOR:- Well, the thistles do quite well too, but at least they are annuals, and where the trees come up presumably the thistles will disappear. We are not concerned about thistles except Nodding Thistles, they are a worst weed. I guess the worst weed that we need to worry about most is wilding pines because if you don't remove those we haven't achieved the job.

MATTHEW:- If we can talk now about some of the other issues that you dealt with while President, other management issues?

ELEANOR:- The next one that came up was eco-tourism which became one of those buzzwords a couple of years ago. The ACT Assembly had a standing committee looking at that. Tourism, they



did a report and there was a Price-Waterhouse report, so we put in several submissions on that and we were very pleased to see that our views seemed to be taken on board; our views at least regards the importance of the national park as a conservation area as that was its prime reason for being there.

MATTHEW:- Who within NPA was writing the submissions, were you involved personally for example?

ELEANOR:- Not much, Nicki Taws actually wrote them at the time and the Environment Sub-committee had a lot of input into that. I wasn't really involved much because I wasn't attending the Environment Sub-committee meetings; I mean at that stage you could attend a meeting every Thursday of the month and I didn't attend them all.

MATTHEW:- Nicki Taws was the NPA's paid research officer and that was one use to which grant funding was being put by NPA, to be able to have access to professional services?

ELEANOR:- Yes, all her work was paid through grant money.

MATTHEW:- So eco-tourism was one issue and do you think that's been satisfactorily resolved; do you think that is still a threat possibly to Namadgi; the opening of fire trails and that sort of thing to commercial operations?

ELEANOR:- Yes. For the moment it's alright, but the Government is always looking at ways to make money out of things and it's something that NPA, I think, will always have to watch. In fact that is a very good reason for NPA continuing to be an active organisation. I mean the latest thing on that is that they have done a recreation study for Gudgenby Homestead and they were thinking of having a concessional lease there. I mean, there are a lot of problems with that. They were looking at having camping on the river flats near Gudgenby, sort of associated with the homestead. So it's certainly not something that has gone away.

MATTHEW:- What other issues do you recall?

ELEANOR:- Well, there was the Australian Alps heritage nomination which seems to have disappeared into limbo again, but we did do some work on that.

MATTHEW:- That's a world heritage nomination isn't it?

ELEANOR:- Yes, it was hoped that we could get that up. I think the main problem there was the Victorian Government and the Victorian NPA were working on that. We did approach Gary Humphries, as our Environment Minister, and he was quite supportive. But they still have cattle grazing and things in the Alps in Victoria, and Jeff Kennett's Government was definitely not supportive of things like reducing that sort of thing in national parks. So it's sort of slipped away and I don't know whether anything will come of that now, but that was one thing we did do a little bit of work on. We prepared a statement on the future use of Tidbinbilla. We had a number of consultations with Government members and meetings on marketing strategy and on the Boboyan pines. After that we have spent a lot of energy on submissions on management plans for the national park and the various reserves in the ACT. It's been very good to see these management plans actually coming through.

MATTHEW:- Of course, the current Namadgi management plan is the one published in 1986, so I guess NPA is lobbying for an revised plan for Namadgi?

ELEANOR:- Yes, that's been some of our latest work. We actually have a large project: our present research officer, who is Ray Polglaze who succeeded Nicki Taws, he's doing some work, sort of background research for that this current financial year. Of course, ACT Environment were all set to go on that plan, but then the native title claim came in and that really put a stop to that because we didn't really quite know how much the Aboriginal groups wanted to be involved, so you couldn't really settle the whole thing without their involvement.



MATTHEW:- Especially as there were two rival claims as well?

ELEANOR:- Well, that has meant nothing has moved on that claim in the meantime and we are still in the same situation. This is really problematic because we keep getting things like the Ginini Flats management plan, we have got action plans for lots of endangered species which cover areas within Namadgi and we have got the campground strategy, so they are forming a lot of policies about the management of Namadgi without having an overriding up-to-date management plan. Now the 1986 management plan is very good in its conservation terms, but a lot of the actual actions are completely out-of-date; a number of them have been completed, some that haven't been completed and it's been shown that they are not really necessary, for example, it suggests that the Old Boboyan Road should be re-opened. Well it seems to work very well with it not being re-opened. There was a suggestion that there should be picnic grounds, ones with barbecues, along the Brindabella or Mt Franklin Road and it really has been shown, I think, to be unnecessary to have developed picnic grounds there. So there are a lot of things like that; and the Boboyan pines too, because the management plan just sort of says that they will be removed someday and there is no indication of how it should be done or anything like that.

MATTHEW:- So events have overtaken the planning?

ELEANOR:- Well and truly, yes.

MATTHEW:- Now regarding native title, that issue came up during your presidency, I think, or just after?

ELEANOR:- It came up, I think, during it. Then it was after that we actually commissioned a report from Dermott Smith which was called "Nourishing Namadgi". In that report he looked at all the shared managements in various national parks around Australia where you have Aboriginal groups. Often the land has been given back to them and they have leased it back to the Commonwealth as a management plan where they have joint management boards. He looked at all the different arrangements for those in that report. So it was quite a valuable document and we hoped it would have the same stimulus effect that the Boboyan pines report had but, unfortunately, there seem to be intractable disagreements and we haven't moved much on that.

MATTHEW:- And NPA set up some sort of working group looking at that issue, didn't they?

ELEANOR:- Well, to look at Dermott Smith's report on that, yes.

MATTHEW:- You mentioned there Tidbinbilla, so we could talk about other places outside of Namadgi within the ACT. Now Canberra Nature Park, I know that NPA during your time had an involvement regarding the fire trails on O'Connor Ridge, and particularly the mountain bike issue?

ELEANOR:- Yes, well the first one that came up was that they graded a lot of trails on O'Connor Ridge and really widely. Things that had been quite narrow walking tracks became quite wide areas, and that was something that did not need to be done at all.

MATTHEW:- So what did NPA do? What? Protest after the event?

ELEANOR:- Yes, protest after the event and tried to get commitments that that sort of thing wouldn't happen again. I think it was partly a grader driver who was not particularly well supervised. He was just asked to improve the drainage and did some great big drains which I think would have ended up draining water straight down the hill and would have helped erosion. It might have helped get water off the track, but I don't think they were particularly well designed for preventing erosion.

MATTHEW:- Now the mountain bike issue?

ELEANOR:- Well, that came up as a proposal from the mountain bike organisation to run the next national championships, the next at that time, on Black Mountain and it appeared to be supported by the head of Environment ACT. On that we were actually approached by Gary Humphries



for an opinion. I think he knew what sort of opinion we'd have and decided to pre-empt protests. So we had a look at the proposed track, and we and the Conservation Council definitely thought it was impossible as far as we were concerned, because it would have started up near the top and down some walking tracks and fire trails, but also through bushland on the western side where there are some creek beds which obviously had been eroded and are now really well revegetated, so an eroding bike track through that, I think, would have been quite disastrous. When we protested against that they tried Mt Majura. We said yes to that as, you know, on the eastern side of Mt Majura there is a pine forest so it was only going to be the top section of the track that went through the Canberra Nature Park and there is a fire trail that it can go down. But when we went to have a look at that we found that they had made a slight variation to their proposal, and they were going to run it down the Casuarina trail which is on the western side which includes steps and is a narrow walking track used by a lot of people. So we disagreed with that; we protested against that and it did end up going down the eastern side. We did agree to some deviations from the fire trail for their mountain bike downhill run. The other races were no problem. They wanted to do some winding bits on and off the track so we agreed to a couple of places where they could do that.

The race was run, I think, in April, 1997. This of course all came up, the Black Mountain suggestion was just before Christmas 1995, so during the holiday period when everybody was away (this is when we always seem to be most on the alert) all this work was done because they wanted to have the track ready for the championship in April. So it was run in April, it was a very dry April and the mountain bike people were saying it's not typical is it, it's dry. It so happened they ran it again the next year, it was even drier, so I'm now convinced that they are now convinced that that is a natural variation and that's what you have to allow for when you are doing things like this in the ACT.

MATTHEW:- Did you have further comment to make on the mountain bike issue?

ELEANOR:- Yes, the mountain bike people did have a couple of work parties to rehabilitate the track which was quite good, but they did have to be supervised of course, by Parks & Conservation people, and the rehabilitation was all done quite well, but I don't think they had a great number of people turning up. One of the problems with mountain bikes in Canberra Nature Park is not the organised mountain bike riders who go in this race, as part of this whole controversy the mountain bike people and Parks & Conservation prepared pamphlets to say how you should ride in Canberra Nature Park, etc, but of course you get lots of individuals who just ride and don't actually have contact with an organisation. So there are a lot of problems with that, so it's not just with the organised race; the organised race has been settled quite well.

I think probably us giving in and allowing it to be run in Canberra Nature Park, you know, accepting that it should be run in Canberra Nature Park and not making further protests on that, did show up some of the problems and now a permanent track has been or is being set up out in the Blue Range area in the pine forests. One of the things that they wanted, of course, was television coverage with the lake as a background; this is why Black Mountain was proposed as they thought this would give very good television coverage of the ACT, etc. Having a track out there they can have a permanent track, and even that has problems because when you do a downhill track with a lot of hard braking, I mean, they don't want the sort of track that prevents erosion, because their idea is to be able to do it in the soft dirt. So I'm not sure what they will do about that.

What I started to say, the other problem with mountain bikes are all the different individuals some of whom are quite irresponsible. A lot of people who walk in Canberra Nature Park have been put off because they get riders coming up behind them riding fast and they don't know what they are going to do, they give them a fright. I think it was Howard or Harold Crocroft (I forget his name exactly) who took photographs on O'Connor Ridge and showed really where mountain



bikes were causing erosion on walking tracks; they are supposed to only go on fire trails but it doesn't take very many runs, if you are braking in the same spot, to start to cause problems.

MATTHEW:- Another area that has been of interest to NPA and, I think, during your period as President was the Lower Molonglo, the conservation values of that area?

ELEANOR:- Well, I don't think we did much about that, we had Peter Barrow doing a report on that but that was mostly on hold during the time I was President, and that's only really come up again after my presidency finished. Again there was a management plan, we have prepared a submission on that, and Ray Polglaze is finishing the Heritage nomination report on that.

MATTHEW:- That's the nomination to the ACT Heritage Places Register?

ELEANOR:- Yes, I think so, but I personally haven't had much to do with that at all.

MATTHEW:- Another issue I think might have been during your period was the growth of telecommunication towers?

ELEANOR:- I think that was mainly before; I haven't had anything really to do with that.

MATTHEW:- Well, let's have a look outside the ACT and, of course, Kosciuszko National Park is right next door, and traditionally NPA has had something to say on Kosciuszko at different times. Were there issues there during your period as President?

ELEANOR:- Well, the main issue that has come up was the Perisher Range enquiry, now I think that might have been mainly after my presidency too; we did have some liaison with the NSW NPA on that. I did attend a meeting at Perisher, a weekend that we had looking at issues for Kosciuszko National Park, but that was before this Perisher Range proposal came up.

MATTHEW:- The Perisher Range proposal of course sees increased development?

ELEANOR:- Yes, that was an extra 900 beds for Perisher Blue area.

MATTHEW:- Brindabella National Park came into being in 1996. Did NPA have any sort of involvement there making submissions?

ELEANOR:- No, not during my time.

MATTHEW:- What about the Budawangs, Morton and Deua National Parks, was there any activity there?

ELEANOR:- No, not really. I know NPA has been involved with work parties and things in the Budawangs, but not during my time as President.

MATTHEW:- Well, just then thinking about other areas nearby but outside the ACT: were there any issues there that NPA was involved with during your time, for example Jervis Bay or other coastal parks?

ELEANOR:- Well, there were a lot of things we had actually just written letters about. I think actually that is really one of the good strengths of NPA which I particularly found, you know, coming in cold to President. I mean, I've been a long-term resident of the ACT so I knew a bit of the background, but obviously I didn't know a lot of what NPA had done. There are a lot of members who keep an eye on issues and will write a letter for you to send and to support. So NPA is very strong in that regard. I think that is one of the things, particularly with Government departments now with so much change of staff and so much cutting down, an organisation like NPA actually provides the sort of community memory that can keep these things going. We spent 16 years on Orroral Homestead from the start, the first work party or the conservation plan, until when the final preserved or renovated homestead was opened; well, we had a ceremony to acknowledge the work. That was 16 years and that was different committees going through, but I think that shows our community commitment continues. The committee was always there saying,



when is this next bit being done. A lot of the work was being done by NPA members, but a lot of the work couldn't be done by them, you know things like the drainage had to be done by the Parks Service and it was always a matter of saying, it's time you did this. Eventually it gets done and you get the renovated homestead.

MATTHEW:- Of course anything to do with the organisation or any organisation at all is only as good and as strong as its membership, so the point you made there about the strength of the NPA membership over the years and its wide ranging interests.

ELEANOR:- I think it's the commitment of people, because they are people who are committed beyond themselves, they really are. NPA members are not just making national parks for themselves to go walking in, they are really looking to the future. I think that's what really guides most people who are active in NPA, they are looking to ensure that the national parks will still be there for their children or grandchildren to be able to go walking in, and to preserve the biodiversity.

MATTHEW:- Now, nearly all of the projects and activities you have referred to, with the exception of Orroral, relate to the natural heritage value of places. Orroral, of course, is part of cultural heritage, and in 1994 the objectives of the Association were changed to include cultural heritage officially. Now, I realise that you weren't necessarily on the committee at that time, but do you recall that event?

ELEANOR:- Yes, I was on the committee, that was when I was Vice-president, it was the November meeting 1994. I wasn't really involved in the build-up to that, but I certainly supported the idea of the cultural heritage being included and it was, I mean, the vote was carried to include it. We certainly hadn't had any problems within the organisation since then of having it included.

MATTHEW:- Do you think that has been a healthy sign that the two halves of the national park issue, which is sometimes or, in the past, has perhaps been at friction with one another, natural and cultural, that they have come together a bit more in recent times?

ELEANOR:- Well, I guess in a way it was absolutely essential that they did because if you take the Aboriginal viewpoint, of course, the whole of the national park is cultural anyway. So I don't think you can really separate the two. Major areas of the park, like the Gudgenby Valley has a lot of Aboriginal culture, but it is also a cleared area. I think probably a lot of its attractiveness is actually because it is open space and that's why it's so popular.

MATTHEW:- Now the Orroral Homestead, a number of the other people interviewed have talked about that and I realise it was well on the way to completion when you joined NPA. Did you get involved in any of those work parties?

ELEANOR:- No, I wasn't involved with any work parties because by the time I was President, I think the only job that still needed to be done was the drainage, the agricultural drain to keep water away from the foundations. That was done, I think, during the time I was President and people like Reg Alder took part, but it wasn't general NPA work parties.

MATTHEW:- That was the Park that put in that drainage. Now what about Tennent Homestead, there have been work parties there during your time?

ELEANOR:- Yes, I've been involved with work parties there.

MATTHEW:- What was NPA's aim there, it seems to have been managed as a ruin. Did NPA want it to be a bit more than that?

ELEANOR:- Well, NPA would have liked to have seen it preserved more. I mean, there was pisé walls for instance which unfortunately collapsed in the time when NPA was trying to push for a bit of preservation rather than just let it all collapse, and before anything was done to preserve it, some of these pisé walls did collapse. We have had work on the shearing shed - at least that's



what I have been involved with - and the fencing. It really is quite fascinating actually, I know I thought it was quite the opposite from the luxurious, well healed squatter's homestead, it really is little bits stuck together, wired together and the use of small materials which, I guess, has problems in that in the longer term it probably can't be conserved. It's sort of not made to last for a long time but certainly for as long as we can keep it reasonably, it's quite a good thing to do, I think.

MATTHEW:- So it's a good thing to do in terms of conserving cultural heritage, and is it a good thing for NPA just in terms of the membership, its cohesiveness and sense of purpose?

ELEANOR:- I think so, we certainly haven't had trouble getting people to come to work parties and take part in them. There is certainly quite a number who are keen to see it get looked after.

MATTHEW:- Did you want to say anything further about the sense of purpose for people working on Tennent Homestead and those sorts of projects?

ELEANOR:- Well, there have been quite a few people who have been keen to work on it and prepared to spend quite a bit of time working on it, so yes, I think there is quite adequate support in NPA for doing that and I certainly haven't heard any complaints about why we are wasting our effort about that sort of thing.

MATTHEW:- Another, I guess, long-term piece of work for NPA has been briar cutting and dabbing. Have you taken part in those work parties?

ELEANOR:- Yes, I've done some of those, well out at Gudgenby too, because that is one of the weeds we have a problem with in the pine plantation area. I think NPA members have got a bit fed up with removing briars but they are a big problem. If you look in some areas of the park they are very thick. It's interesting the attitudes. I think the Gudgenby Bush Regeneration Group (GBRG) have perhaps the greater sense of ownership for the area they are working on, and they see that briars are a problem and I think are quite happy to do work parties removing them.

MATTHEW:- Now another project that NPA has been involved with, perhaps after your time but you may be able to comment on it, is the research into the lichen problem at the Nursery Swamp [Aboriginal] art site.

ELEANOR:- Yes well, it wasn't really after my time, I was Immediate Past President, of course, for two years after being President and I was still on the committee, but Clive Hurlstone dealt with that. That actually came about because Parks & Conservation couldn't get funding to do it themselves and they actually asked us as a community organisation to apply for the grants to do that. That was getting consultants to do the work, so that wasn't actually involving a lot of NPA time, it wasn't involved in work parties for example by NPA members, it was just a matter supervising.

MATTHEW:- So the NPA was really a proxy for the Parks Service in getting some funding?

ELEANOR:- Well, you could say that, yes. It's an interesting turn on the way governments do things.

MATTHEW:- Before we go on to the outings program we might just go back over a couple of issues, the consultative process that has been established under the ACT Government, and I know that you have been NPA representative on that.

ELEANOR:- When I became President we had a committee called the ECCC and we had NPA representation on that.

MATTHEW:- So that was the Environment Community Consultative Committee, is that what it stood for?

ELEANOR:- I forget exactly what it stood for but something like that. Apparently it grew out of an Advisory Committee for Namadgi National Park, but it has become a more general environment



advisory committee. Now, when the Liberals became government, succeeding the Labor, they continued that for a little while but then they let it lapse because people had been appointed for 3 years, I think. It took them quite a long time to set up some alternative. When we talked to Gary Humphries he said, well look there is a formal process for advising me, sort of thing, but this committee was actually in limbo so we kept pressing for something else to be set up. They did set up what they called the Environment Advisory Committee which is chaired by Peter Cullen, and under that committee there are three or four sub-committees, but the one relevant to NPA, or most relevant to NPA, was the Nature Conservation and Namadgi Sub-committee which is chaired by Arthur Georges, and I am a member of that and that looks at Namadgi issues. So instead of being part of a committee that has direct reporting to the Minister, the Namadgi and other reserve interests are part of a sub-committee that refers to another committee which then refers to the Minister.

MATTHEW:- So you are a bit more detached?

ELEANOR:- We are a bit more detached, but I think its role is very, very important for an organisation like NPA. I think it's very valuable for the community. I'm not sure that all of Environment ACT staff thinks it is; I think sometimes it's a bit of a thorn in their flesh. But I think it is very important that we have it there; we have looked at management plans trying not to do it in a confrontational kind of way, but just to make sure that things are done properly for conservation.

MATTHEW:- And so you think it is an effective voice for the community, an effective way for the community to have a say?

ELEANOR:- Well, certainly a lot better than nothing, yes.

MATTHEW:- Now, there was another item that you wanted to say a little bit more on, Canberra Nature Park and the plan of management?

ELEANOR:- We did a submission on that plan of management and, of course, Canberra Nature Park is, I think, 24 or more areas, so it's quite a complicated plan. NPA felt quite strongly that it didn't have enough detail in it. In preparing our submission we consulted quite extensively with the Conservation Council, in fact, we prepared a joint submission. We also had a public meeting at which any conservation organisation or any community group could come and discuss things at the beginning of preparing that submission. So we put in quite a large report. Well, one of the problems in Canberra Nature Park - we have already talked about the mountain bikes - but another problem are the horse trails, access by horse users. It seemed to be that the ACT Government rather jumped the gun there, community groups were talking about the horse access and the ACT Government released the plan to the Assembly or to the Minister which then has to go to the Assembly. The Assembly can object to it or their Standing Committee on the Environment and something or other could look at it more closely. So we put in another submission through the Assembly's Standing Committee and through that actually Colin Adrian who is the Director of Environment ACT suggested that they could then have Implementation Plans. Because we objected to the lack of detail in Canberra Nature Park management plan, they would actually put out annual Implementation Plans which wouldn't have to go through this legislative process and so wouldn't be so demanding of time and staff from Environment ACT, but the NPA and Conservation Council would get a chance to comment on these. I must admit for Canberra Nature Park we are still waiting for these, I think they are starting work on them now.

MATTHEW:- Perhaps at this point we'll talk a bit about the outings program, now how involved have you been as a walks leader for NPA?

ELEANOR:- Not very involved, I've lead a couple of walks to try and encourage more family activities. NPA has a bit of a problem with its ageing membership; we have quite a lot of younger people going on walks, but we don't really cater to family activities very well and we do have parents of families and families as members. So that was to try and do that, but they weren't very



well attended. Other outings have been work parties out at Gudgenby as an adjunct to the Gudgenby Regeneration Project, removing pine wildings; the sort of thing which is walking through the bush and some of it is quite dense scrub, finding wildings which have spread quite a number of kilometres south of the plantation area. That seemed to be a work party that was more suited to NPA members than perhaps to some of the other people in the Gudgenby Bush Regeneration Group. So NPA's had a number of those work parties.

MATTHEW:- How important do you think the outings program is to NPA in terms of what NPA tries to achieve and itself as an organisation?

ELEANOR:- Very, very important. It's probably the main social cohesion of the organisation, I think.

MATTHEW:- Do you think it's important for gaining new members?

ELEANOR:- Yes, we did a survey through the *Bulletin* actually when we were getting worried we were overspending our budget, and we were really looking at NPA's activities to see how we could manage things better. Most people responded that the main activity of most people was to read the *Bulletin*, but most people seemed to join NPA to go on outings. It was quite interesting because there was a bit of a change of attitude which seemed to be apparent through the questionnaire in that people joined, I think, for the social activities and the outings but after they became members they became more aware of conservation and more interested in that, which suggested the *Bulletin* was having an educational effect.

MATTHEW:- As far as walking goes can you tell me about some of your favourite walk locations in the ACT?

ELEANOR:- Well, I tend not to have real favourites I suppose. I like snow gum country, you know, I like Mt Gingera but that doesn't mean I go there often. I certainly like the Gudgenby Valley but I don't go there on NPA outings, only on work parties. We just have lots of places in the ACT which are really beautiful, and to have that in wilderness is something that's there.

MATTHEW:- And it's not a matter of having to go there necessarily, but know that they are there?

ELEANOR:- Yes, and in fact now that my lifestyle is not under a lot of stress, I don't have young children running around etc, I haven't got that need to get away. It's certainly nice to know it's there all the time.

MATTHEW:- Talking then about the Bulletin and you mentioned that survey of members, so that reflected the success of the Bulletin as an important voice for the Association?

ELEANOR:- Yes, we got about 80 replies back which is quite a high proportion of membership, a very high proportion, sometimes I think you only get about 10% back on this sort of survey, and that was probably about 30%; it's a bit hard to know because we have so many family members and one person might be writing for the whole family.

I was actually responsible for the *Bulletin* and when I took over as President Green Words was contracted as editor, but I was sort of the coordinator, I suppose, as President and we had a couple of people who helped proof read. That continued for a while, but as I mentioned before we were having trouble with our finances and so had to cut down costs. Clive Hurlstone actually asked Syd Comfort if he would be interested in helping with the *Bulletin*, and he then organised a working group and still is doing that. That has proved a great improvement, it cut the cost of the *Bulletin* in half because instead of paying for someone to edit and type up stuff we are now doing it with volunteers. Green Words still does the layout, but that's a much smaller section of the preparation. We have also cut the actual cost of printing because it's photocopied now; the membership is a bit smaller so there is no need to go preparing plates for printing, the photocopying printing is cheaper. Also what Green Words wasn't doing adequately was sort of looking forward to what could go in the *Bulletin*. We tended to just take what was being submitted rather than



asking people to do things. Having NPA members strongly involved with it and looking at the thing from a more holistic point of view that's improved greatly too. That's where I think I was at a disadvantage, you know, coming in without knowing a lot about the detail about NPA.

MATTHEW:- Now, there have been other publications that NPA's put out over the years, the first one way back in 1971, Mountain Slopes and Plains, but during your time the Field Guide to the Birds of the ACT was reprinted, I think.

ELEANOR:- It was reprinted yes. I joined after the first printing of that, but I actually organised the reprint of that. I wasn't President at that time, but it actually got very complicated because Goanna Print had lost or they had thrown out the plates which is something they should not have done before they asked us. Also, I guess, we were at fault in that we didn't sort of check up on where they were because the reprint was, I think, three years after the original printing and that's a fairly long time for a printer to hang on to plates. We still had the original paintings, and we still have them. So Goanna Print was going to do a facsimile reproduction from the original edition, but then they decided they'd put it on computer because just in those few years printing production has changed quite dramatically. Things are more computerised and if it is on the computer, the following edition would be very easy to make corrections and set it up again. Unfortunately, they scanned the pages and they got all sorts of typing errors, they kept putting in words that were slightly different, instead of under-wing it became upper-wing or upper-body instead of under-body, etc.

MATTHEW:- So the scanner was misreading the words?

ELEANOR:- There were some words that the scanner had quite some problems with, they were printed out as real words, but they weren't the right words. So it took some very heavy proof-reading on that, and McComas Taylor was not happy.

MATTHEW:- The fact that it was reprinted surely indicates that the publication had been very successful for NPA, the initial publication?

ELEANOR:- Yes, it's still selling at the rate of 600 copies a year, so it was well worth printing another 3000 copies.

MATTHEW:- Canberra must be a very bird-watching oriented place.

ELEANOR:- Well, bird books actually sell well generally anywhere, but having a local bird book is obviously a very good thing. I should go back to McComas Taylor not being happy, I mean he was quite happy at the end, it just took quite a long time to get things right.

MATTHEW:- A further publication, well the most recent book of NPA's has been the Guide to Reptiles and Frogs which came out in 1998 [97]. What role did you play there?

ELEANOR:- Not really a lot in that. Alastair Morrison who, as you know, donated the money for the bird guide, for the first printing of the bird guide, also did this for the reptile and frog guide and he also organised the setting up arrangement for Ross Bennett to write it and to get the photographs, etc. I mean, NPA is really indebted to Alastair's generosity and his foresight in preparing something like that.

MATTHEW:- In this case, with the reptile book, it was written by Ross Bennett who is not a member of NPA, but nonetheless the person most knowledgeable on the subject?

ELEANOR:- Yes, and he has now opened the Australian Reptile Centre in the ACT so he is doing something that he has wanted to do for a long, long time.

MATTHEW:- More recently NPA's put out a pamphlet as part of its publicity program in an endeavour to get more members?

ELEANOR:- Yes, last year we were very concerned we weren't getting very many new members.



We have quite a bit of turnover of members, people leaving each year and we usually get quite a lot of new ones, too. Although membership has dropped from its peak a number of years ago, perhaps 10 years ago, it seemed to be fairly stable. But last year we were going downhill and we were really rather worried. So we looked at that and produced a pamphlet working with Green Words again, and that seems to have been quite effective because our new membership is coming back and also, I think, it's had a bit of an effect in helping us retain members. People see this, it's quite a colourful brochure, and just the fact that it's there perhaps has given a more lively image to NPA. We have done quite a bit of work in promoting NPA through exhibitions. We normally have a stall at 'ACT Alive' which has worked very well; we have a display on display boards, with photographs of our various activities. Each year we add a new bit to that to keep it up-to-date, and the pamphlet is what we added this year. We also actually added a drawing I did of the skyline of Canberra and identifying what all the peaks are along the skyline, and we also had photographs which Martin Chalk took showing parts of the skyline. We couldn't do it just as photographs because the camera lens doesn't lie and visually actually you don't actually see things in general proportions, you tend to see more the things you like seeing. When you do a painting of the skyline you can exaggerate and make it seem a bit more like what you were seeing, but it's not what the camera sees. That sounds a bit complicated. So the combination of these photographs and this labelled skyline plus photographs of NPA walks to areas that are shown up on the maps makes quite a good display, and that's what we added to our stock of display materials this year. As well as showing it at 'ACT Alive' we've taken it around a number of ACT libraries and we need to keep doing that. We've made sure that the pamphlet goes to Namadji Visitor Centre, to Tidbinbilla, and Tim Walsh was actually taking a lot to the gym that he goes to for example. He thought that they are active people and they should get involved in NPA, but I'm not sure how effective that was.

MATTHEW:- You have also been involved at the Easter Extravaganza at Tidbinbilla?

ELEANOR:- Just this year, yes. That's quite a family occasion actually, and we really do need to look more at outings that include families and things like that. Max Lawrence has done a very good job as outings organiser and he has made sure that he has introduced more easy outings. There has been a bit of a tendency, I suppose, as we have a number of 'tiger' walkers, to go on quite hard walks (like your one) and that's fine, but we really need to balance that with some easier walks too. We also have Wednesday walks once a month now which, I think, get a reasonable turn up. It's interesting because Family Bushwalkers are doing that too and, of course, Walking for Pleasure has done daywalks a lot too. So there really are an awful lot of activities like that available for people in Canberra.

MATTHEW:- Yes, it's interesting to hear you talk about the need for families to be at ease with NPA and George Chippendale, for example, talked about the family emphasis in Nancy Burbidge's trips, so obviously it's becoming a concern once again to try and increase that scope for families with the organisation.

ELEANOR:- Yes, it was good to see quite a few families at our Christmas Party this year too, and they seemed to join in. It's interesting, children seemed to quite enjoy an auction. If we don't provide activities for children we don't bring their parents along so easily, I mean not all parents can get away for a weekend and we need to get that younger age of adults involved in NPA.

MATTHEW:- The meetings, the general meetings, once a month: they combine a business element and then there is a guest speaker. Has that style of meeting changed at all during the time that you came into the organisation this decade?

ELEANOR:- Well, that was the style of meeting that I inherited when I became President and I didn't attempt to change it. All I tried to do was to keep the business very tight so that it was just keeping members informed. I think that you can judge by some of the discussions that people are interested in the business, they certainly comment on things and sometimes they bring



things up themselves, for example, when we were running down our stock of money people were very concerned about that and brought that up. I mean, it wasn't the committee that brought that up at a general meeting, it was other members. So they do like to be informed but you have to be a bit careful about going on too long about that. The meeting venue has changed; we used to meet at the Griffin Centre which was getting rather noisy and people were a bit concerned about parking. We launched the reptile guide at Forestry House and we also knew that other organisations like Kosciuszko Huts Association have meetings there. So we investigated that and found it was available, and so we have moved there now. I think it is a much pleasanter location, still quite central and I don't think anybody came to meetings on public transport anyway, so that's probably not a handicap.

MATTHEW:- Yes, and the first edition of the bird guide was also launched there at Forestry House back in 1993. You wanted to mention the new forestry project that NPA is involved with?

ELEANOR:- Yes, in this current financial year Clive Hurlstone put in an application for a grant of money from the ACT Environment Grants, and he put in obviously a very good application because we got \$26,000, and we never got that sort of money before. Part of that was mentioned already, that Ray Polgraze is working on a project for the Namadgi management plan, but also a very large part of that grant money was going towards a project on the areas of conservation value within land administered by ACT Forests, and we are also doing some field trips. Part of the conditions of the grant is that NPA has to provide in-kind value, the equivalent of the grant money, so that means NPA members have to spend quite a bit of time on field trips, etc which are necessary too, to make a satisfactory assessment of the conservation-value areas. I have been on two of those field trips to the ACT forests and they have been really quite interesting, very interesting I should say.

MATTHEW:- Getting near the end of the questions I had in mind: Now, what do you think Namadgi means to you as an individual?

ELEANOR:- Well, I suppose the idea of wilderness as such, I think, is a very important thing. I obviously like natural history and actual things, and I really think it's uplifting to the soul to go out into areas where you have bush all around you and to get away from the structured modern environment. I suppose, the idea us Europeans have of wilderness is not really an Aboriginal's idea of wilderness, as they argue that all of the vegetation, the whole environment within Australia has been affected by humans. So you are not actually getting away from human influence, but what you are getting away from is modern industrial society, and I think that is a very important thing to do, it is for me and it certainly is for quite a lot of other people as well.

MATTHEW:- Do you think NPA has a lot to be proud of in its past ?

ELEANOR:- Yes, I mean, I think I'm very happy that I got involved with it. I think it has achieved a lot through things like the Boboyan pines report, the Nourishing Namadgi report and hopefully by the projects underway. It's got a role to play doing that sort of thing for a long time to come, almost indefinitely I would think.

MATTHEW:- That's just about the end of the questions I had in mind. Are there further points you would like to make based on the notes you've got there?

ELEANOR:- What we haven't covered is the land management agreements because that is another issue that has come up since Clive's [Hurlstone] been President. That is again like the forestry project, it's conservation of reserves because some of the Action Plans, the ones on the red-box / yellow-box grassy land for example, showed that quite a lot of the best examples of that are on rural leases. So there is that aspect of it. Also, the ACT Government is proposing to change the conditions of the leases, so rural leases, at least those that are not likely to be taken up for further expansion of Canberra, would be given 99-year leases. So it was very important that these leases had satisfactory conditions that would encourage conservation of good natural



areas, and NPA through Clive Hurlstone and Ray Polglaze put a lot of effort into submissions on the property management agreements, I called them land management agreements earlier, they were called that to begin with but now it's property management agreements. A rural conservation trust, I'm not sure whether that is the right name, is being set up which would provide funds for leaseholders to do conservation work, and NPA is not happy with the structure that is being set up and which has now actually been accepted by the Assembly.

MATTHEW:- It's not happy with that, so you would like to see some changes?

ELEANOR:- So a lot of that work in the submission, unfortunately, didn't win the day.

MATTHEW:- Is there anything further you would like to say before we finish?

ELEANOR:- No. I think that covers all the major things. I think that's it.

MATTHEW:- Well, thank you very much for your time today.

ELEANOR:- Thank you, Matthew.