



## **INTERVIEW WITH SHEILA KRUSE**

(NPA Life Member 1979)

*MATTHEW:- This is an interview by Matthew Higgins with Sheila Kruse for the National Parks Association's Oral History Project taking place at Sheila's home on 15 December 1999.*

*Sheila, firstly, thanks very much for agreeing to do the interview today, and I'm looking forward to hearing some of your memories of your participation in the National Parks Association. Before we get on to the NPA period of your life, if we could just look at your earlier life for a moment. Now you were born in Melbourne in 1913 and didn't move to Canberra until 1970.*

*Now in the earlier part of your life, were there many influences which might have led you to have an interest in the outdoors or camping or things like that?*

SHEILA:- Yes, definitely. We had a family cottage at Dromana which is on Port Phillip Bay, about 45 miles (I have to think in miles) from Melbourne, and we spent holidays there. It was at the foot of Arthurs Seat which is on Mornington Peninsula. If it wasn't beach weather, we'd walk all over Dromana, we'd walk up Arthurs Seat, gently up the road when we were younger, then we'd find tracks that would take us up the side. Not a challenging mountain, it's only about 1600 feet, I think, but still that was in our childhood. We did walk, in our teens; my eldest sister would take us walking out from home which was in the suburb of Canterbury. Those days the open country wasn't that far away from the suburb, so on the weekends we'd go walking

*MATTHEW:- And I think you mentioned there were church trips too?*

SHEILA:- Oh, yes there were because we went to the Methodist Church and there was a good congregation of young people, about my age, a year or two older or a year or two younger. So it was very lively, there were walks. We'd take the train up to Ferntree Gully and walk up, I think it was One Tree Hill perhaps, at Ferntree Gully. There were tennis clubs and there were basketball teams, so yes we were out of doors quite a lot. It was that, I suppose, the fact that I was used to the outdoors that made me take up the opportunity to join National Parks.

*MATTHEW:- Now, just briefly to go over your career. I know that you were in the Australian Women's Army Service during the Second World War and then worked with the Universities Commission and APM and then CSIRO in 1949.*

SHEILA:- That's right.

*MATTHEW:- And you had a senior secretarial position within the organisation. You were secretary to the head of CSIRO. Is that correct?*

SHEILA:- Well, first of all it was to the Secretary of CSIRO. That taught me a lot about meeting procedure and minute taking by dictation from him. That lasted for about 17 years, before he went off to the United Nations, and Dr Price came onto the Executive. Dr Price, three years later, became the Chairman.

*MATTHEW:- Who was that Secretary you were working to?*

SHEILA:- It was Guy Gresford.

*MATTHEW:- Guy Gresford.*

SHEILA:- Yes, and I couldn't have had a better boss as far as learning about the job because he'd come out of the executive meeting and tell me all the proceedings, which was very good because all bosses don't do that. If he'd had phone calls, business phone calls I mean, when we were working together in his room, then he would explain it, who it was and who he was. So really it was due to his tuition, really it amounted to, I learned a lot about the job and, I think, he encouraged that.



*MATTHEW:- Now, as we said, you arrived in Canberra in 1970 and you joined the NPA in 1971. Can you tell me how it was that you got to know of the NPA and how it was you joined?*

*SHEILA:- I can indeed. I have to thank Gabrielle Watt first of all, who worked at Black Mountain. She was in the Computer Research Division, the librarian there. We met after I'd been here, towards the end of 1970, I think. She was living in the Currong Flats. So she invited me to her flat one afternoon and Julie Henry was there. Julie lived in the flat above me and, well in talking, they said, "What are your interests, what did you do on the weekends when you were in Melbourne", and we discussed that, and they said, "You might like to join National Parks". I said, "That sounds nice", so nothing more than that happened, it was the end of the year or the beginning of next year, there was nothing doing at the moment anyway. So Gabrielle rang me, it was in February 1971, to say that she was going to walk the following Sunday, being given a lift and she knew there was a spare seat in the car and would I like to go. "Yes" I said, "that'd be nice". The driver turned out to be Margaret Aston whom I'd already met several times in Canberra, so that was good. It was a hot, hot February day. The walk was led by Professor Jennings out to Wee Jasper, it was a caving walk. We congregated early after lunch and I was fascinated at the sight, there must have been about 70 people on that walk and I had never seen such a weird collection of clothing in one spot ever, they ranged from people in full hiking gear to people virtually in their beach clothes. However, that was alright. We charged across the paddocks following Jennings striding away, approaching the caves which were not my interest whatsoever, I couldn't bear to go down in the cave, I'd be quite claustrophobic. However, that was really a good afternoon and I thought, "Well this'll do me for the weekends, lovely". So then I started going to the meetings and other walks, gentle ones.*

*MATTHEW:- And of course you very soon filled the position of Secretary, which you had for 10 years.*

*SHEILA:- Yes, to say it was a surprise is putting it mildly. Julie Henry came down one evening: well she rang to ask if she could come down, she had something to talk about.*

*MATTHEW:- That was here in the Currong Flats where you still live today?*

*SHEILA:- Yes, here where I'm sitting now. So down on she came. I knew Julie well by this time, she was the outgoing President. So she came down and she fiddled round talking about other things, I thought she'd never get around to saying what she came down for. So she said eventually, that it had been suggested that perhaps I might be willing to take on the secretaryship. They'd been having a make-do arrangement all the year because the previous Secretary had left at the end of the year before and there'd been willing people filling in. However I said, "Yes, I'm quite happy to do that".*

*I said I know nothing about national parks and really nothing about New South Wales but I'm quite happy to do it because of my experience in meeting procedure. I'd had more intense experience with Dr Price after I came to Canberra, before I came to Canberra really, because he was chairman of an Academy Chemistry Committee, and for about 3 years they were planning an international chemistry conference in Canberra. So a lot of the work over those first three years working for him was really Academy business and I was taking minutes and arranging the meeting myself. So that was no trouble as far as my work for the National Parks was concerned and it turned out for me it was a very happy arrangement, I enjoyed it enormously.*

*MATTHEW:- What was your job as Secretary to the NPA? What did you have to do?*

*SHEILA:- I had to arrange the meeting procedures, and the syllabus of course.*

*MATTHEW:- The agenda.*

*SHEILA:- The agenda, yes, and take the minutes, read them out and - it's hard to say - just general arrangement, I'd follow that. Of course there would be committee meetings, once a fortnight*



I think it was, yes once a fortnight, I think, and general meetings once a month.

*MATTHEW:- So would you have to be in contact with the President, or what, sort of out of hours on the phone?*

SHEILA:- Oh, frequently, perhaps follow up business from the meetings, or discussing correspondence that had come in during the week that needed perhaps immediate consideration, if not immediate decision. Oh yes, a lot of that, and the first President was George Chippendale, my first President. He had to leave after 10 months because he was on his way to London to be the Australian representative at Kew Gardens, and then Bill Watson who was Vice-President took over. Bill was then President for two years.

*MATTHEW:- And then other presidents included Ian Currie?*

SHEILA:- Yes, he followed Bill Watson, and I can't remember the order, who came after Bill Watson.

*MATTHEW:- John Banks was another one.*

SHEILA:- John Banks was another one. Neville Esau was another one. Daryl Hawke. Ian again at some stage.

*MATTHEW:- And you mentioned earlier that you very much enjoyed being in that position. What was it about it that you enjoyed so much? Was it just a good group to get along with, or a worthwhile experience, something that you could see that you were achieving?*

SHEILA:- Well, I think the pleasure of the people, I mean, the pleasure of working with them because it really didn't seem particularly like work to me. It was being with them and having a job to do, I think it was that, and also I realised afterwards I got to know far more people in the National Parks than I would have if I had just been a member. I'm sure I did because..... it is hard to say why, isn't it, but I'm sure you do if you are in a position on the committee for instance.

*MATTHEW:- Because you're more committed, more involved?*

SHEILA:- I think so, yes, and of course there are people on sub-committees that aren't on the main committee. Oh no, I just liked it, it was also very good for me, because when I retired three years later, I had a job to do. I had responsibility to somebody else apart from myself. I think when you first retire inevitably you miss the discipline of going to work every day, even if you're glad not to. That's why I think it was good for me.

*MATTHEW:- Now you also had a few other positions too, I think you were the convener of the membership sub-committee in 1977-78. Do you recall that?*

SHEILA:- I wouldn't be surprised. Oh, yes, I was, I forget who'd been doing it before. That wasn't much of a trouble and it was quite interesting for me to know and to be reminded of who were the members.

*MATTHEW:- Was it a very healthy membership at that time in terms of numbers?*

SHEILA:- Yes, it was. I couldn't possibly say what the numbers were but, yes, it was quite encouraging. It was a lively organisation, very lively. I don't think at the beginning we were quite so involved in conservation work; I'm not sure that there were big issues then. It developed before I left, of course, apart from the early Black Mountain Tower, and that was a lively operation.

*MATTHEW:- We'll talk about that in a moment for sure. You were also, well, at the time you finished being Secretary in 1981, you were Publicity Officer and Librarian for a couple of years.*

SHEILA:- Oh, yes, so I was. Well, I don't know that the publicity part took up a great deal of time but the Librarian was quite interesting because inevitably the files and the books we had got a bit



haphazardly arranged in the Griffin Centre. We didn't have a great deal of space and I suppose it suited my secretarial mind to get them in good order. I had the help of Mavis Michell who was another member and I didn't know when we began and she offered to help me that she was an ex-librarian. So that was very helpful for me. I didn't want to drop out too soon.

*MATTHEW:- Now, at one stage during that 10 years, the organisation was awarded a National State Grant, during 1974-75. Some of it may have been put towards the Bulletin. Do you remember that grant being awarded and how it was used?*

SHEILA:- Yes, I do, not in any great detail I'm afraid, but I do remember it. I remember now you mention it, I wouldn't have remembered if you hadn't mentioned it I think. What date was it did you say?

*MATTHEW:- 1974-75.*

SHEILA:- Yes, I think probably Bill Watson was a strong pusher for that grant.

*MATTHEW:- So that would have been the first grant of money awarded?*

SHEILA:- Yes, it was. It was the first time we really were responsible to another body for our spending.

*MATTHEW:- Because prior to that you'd only had member subscriptions?*

SHEILA:- That's right, yes. That's where I think, perhaps from then on, we were beginning to get involved in, I suppose you'd call them issues. You won't be surprised if my memory's a little bit hazy about the dates and the development of National Parks from the outside point of view.

*MATTHEW:- Well, we might talk about a few issues. Now, of course, the main one was campaign for a national park for the national capital.*

SHEILA:- That was a magnificent campaign in which, of course, I had nothing to do as I wasn't even a member when it began. But I have read the submission of course, and I think the work that a small group of people did was absolutely magnificent. They were Nancy Burbidge certainly, Robert Story, Bob Story as we knew him, Julie Henry, Fiona Brand and John Shunky. Have I left somebody out, I probably have.

*MATTHEW:- No, that's pretty good going so far. What sort of person was Nancy Burbidge?*

SHEILA:- Oh wonderful, just wonderful. She was a person, of course you respected her for her work in botany. You'd know the books she wrote on Australian flora, ACT flora, I think, from memory. Very interested in the National Parks Association. She led some walks, botanical walks, not many, but she led them and we were given very helpful handouts about the material she'd been discussing.

*MATTHEW:- I remember in the early Bulletins she used to have a regular feature called 'Eyes and No-eyes'.*

SHEILA:- Oh she did, yes, that was delightful and it was a very good caption wasn't it, because I mean you can look and not see very easily. No, she did her very best to train us in observation.

*MATTHEW:- Was she a very strong, forceful personality?*

SHEILA:- Yes, I think she was. I don't think we saw a great deal of her on walks in those days. I don't know that she was an every-time walker as some people were. Julie Henry for instance, of course she wouldn't miss anything, she was very keen, very knowledgeable as many of the others were. Nancy, she was nice, I liked her and I got on with her very well, and it was tragic to see her go in the end.

*MATTHEW:- Yes, 1977.*

SHEILA:- I think that would be right, yes.



*MATTHEW:- Before Gudgenby Nature Reserve was declared.*

*SHEILA:- Yes, that's true, yes.*

*MATTHEW:- And the campaign, how was it actually waged, Sheila? What sort of activities was the NPA doing in this movement to get a national park?*

*SHEILA:- Writing to the Minister for the Interior. I'm not sure that over that period that there were not two Ministers for the Interior, yes two of them. I'm not sure but I think Doug Anthony from memory was one, but that was before I joined the organisation.*

*MATTHEW:- During the time you were Secretary, Interior changed and became the Department of the Capital Territory.*

*SHEILA:- Yes, that's right. I think, I'm a bit hazy now, but I think the first main response they got from the Minister, was a suggestion that National Parks and other organisations, such as the bushwalkers, and I can't remember who else, it certainly was more than just the two of them, should join forces for probably a meeting I suppose and perhaps an augmented submission. I'm a bit hazy about the details here but certainly there was more than National Parks in what I feel was the second part of the operation. Yes, there was a second submission, I think I'm right there.*

*MATTHEW:- Yes, and the Canberra Bushwalkers, some of them took a couple of the local politicians up to Mt Kelly in the 1970s.*

*SHEILA:- Oh did they.*

*MATTHEW:- Yes, do you recall that?*

*SHEILA:- Yes, I'm sure, you remind me of that, but I'd forgotten.*

*MATTHEW:- Senator Knight and Mr Haslem I think, were the politicians.*

*SHEILA:- That would be a good thing to do, wouldn't it.*

*MATTHEW:- And once Gudgenby was declared in 1979, what was the feeling, what was the response within NPA?*

*SHEILA:- Jubilation I think, relief probably, because they could just sit back and enjoy the fruits of all their labours. Oh, just general rejoicing and a feeling of enormous satisfaction that it had all been worthwhile. It was a long period, wasn't it, a long period. It didn't let go.*

*MATTHEW:- Yes, a very tenacious organisation.*

*SHEILA:- Yes, very tenacious. When you think of the people, that original group, who planned it and worked so hard on it, you'd realise that none of them would let it go.*

*MATTHEW:- And, of course, it was only a nature reserve in 1979, there was still work to be done to have it as a full national park. Do you recall some of the goings on then, between 1979 and 1984, when Namadgi came into being?*

*SHEILA:- Not really, not in any detail, nothing I could say about it, but I certainly knew it went on.*

*MATTHEW:- There was one event, and I think you were involved with Den Robin in taking Tom Uren down to Gudgenby in 1983. Do you recall that?*

*SHEILA:- Yes, we did. Yes, now what prompted that? There must have been some ulterior motive to try to lure him down there. What was the special reason for that? Yes, I do remember, it was a perfect day. He was very nice and very enthusiastic about the whole thing, he probably enjoyed a day in the country, I should think, for one thing. For all I know, it might have been something he was really interested in and delighted to come and have a look around and hear people talking about it. How do you know with a politician if you're doing the right thing anyway, but he gave*



every indication of being happy to do it.

*MATTHEW:- Do you recall where you actually took him?*

SHEILA:- No I can't remember I'm afraid.

*MATTHEW:- I think in one of the NPA Bulletins, the report on this visit said he was quite keen to have the upper Cotter catchment added to the park. Does that ring a bell?*

SHEILA:- Yes, you're reminding me of things I'd forgotten, details. There was another occasion too, when was it, I think when we were launching our field guide and he did it for us.

*MATTHEW:- That was the field guide to trees.*

SHEILA:- Yes, that's right.

*MATTHEW:- Well, we'll talk about that for a moment. Now, you were involved with Babette Scougall, I think, and others in getting it together.*

SHEILA:- Yes, I suppose I was convening the committee that did the real work in producing the book, the people who contributed the material, the botanical material and Babette Scougall who really looked after the actual publication. She had had the experience. I think she was working for the Government printer at the time. I think also, she had done a course in publishing probably, I don't know what it was called, but it would be publishing, so she knew how to go about it, she knew about desirable layouts, she knew about the type of prints, and things the rest of us knew nothing about at all. So she was really responsible for the general look of the book, that's all Babette's work. I just took notes and arranged meetings, that sort of thing.

*MATTHEW:- Whose idea was it to have a field guide to the trees of the ACT?*

SHEILA:- It was a group of the committee at a meeting that I didn't attend, I can't remember why. I think John Banks was a member of that committee, Ian Currie would have been and Den Robin was very enthusiastic. I can't even say now which one suggested a book; no, I can't remember. It, the idea, was enthusiastically received, I think, and we got to work.

*MATTHEW:- And did it sell well, once you brought it out, did it sell well?*

SHEILA:- Yes it did sell well, but it meant hard work on the part of the members as we had to go out and sell it. Daltons I know were very good at taking copies, they were at that stage in Garema Place, as a general booksellers, but they're rather specialised now. I remember taking bundles over there from time to time. The universities I think. I can remember taking copies out to the University of Canberra certainly, and I suppose there was the ANU bookshop too. There were a number of us on that as they actually had to be hand delivered. It was really hard work and making sure that they had the books well to the front. It might have been Julie Henry, I'm not sure, no it wasn't, I can't think who it was, used to go into the bookshops that were stocking it and make sure if they weren't to the forefront they'd put them to the front. Who could that have been, I've forgotten now. But I mean you did have to work hard to sell them and it did sell well.

*MATTHEW:- So, it did earn some funds for the organisation?*

SHEILA:- Yes.

*MATTHEW:- OK. Just to come back to that issue of Gudgenby, and that movement to have Namadji declared, and of course in 1984 the upper Cotter catchment was added to Gudgenby to form Namadji National Park. What was the reaction then for NPA?*

SHEILA:- Oh, well certainly delight, yes. There were triumphs and it was deeply satisfactory that this should have happened, and encouraging when good solid work in trying to get these things achieved had been successful.



*MATTHEW:- Prior to even nature reserve status and national park status, was it a bit like a national park anyway in that you could go down there and go walking, despite the fact there was grazing going on during the 1970s say?*

SHEILA:- Yes, I would say that was right.

*MATTHEW:- So did you have a good relationship with the landholders? You'd go on to their holdings?*

SHEILA:- Some, I think, probably not all. I seem to remember there was trouble with one or some of them, but yes. You're just reminding me of things that I hadn't thought of for years.

*MATTHEW:- Do you remember the names of some of the ones that you got on well with?*

SHEILA:- No, I couldn't tell you now, no, I don't remember.

*MATTHEW:- Did you as a member of a walking group, or the walking group as a whole, did you have much actual contact with the landholders when you were down there, would you see them, talk to them?*

SHEILA:- I don't think so, and I would have had nothing to do with approaching them or discussing things with them, I would just go along as a walker. I think apart from my responsibilities as Secretary I just was a member and I just went where people went. I just went along. I left all that to other people. I didn't have the knowledge for one thing of the wider situation. I think that was one thing, but I didn't involve myself in that sort of thing. I just noted it and recorded it.

*MATTHEW:- Now, perhaps moving on to other issues that NPA was involved in and particularly Black Mountain and the struggle over the Tower, and I note that you were on the Black Mountain sub-committee of NPA during 1976-77. So what was the struggle there, Sheila?*

SHEILA:- I would have been on the sub-committee because I was Secretary of the organisation, not that I was taking any part in the actual enterprise as you would call it. I was fascinated because I had never been involved in any protest operations before.

*MATTHEW:- Sheila, you were just saying, prior to the Black Mountain affair, you hadn't been involved in these sort of demonstrations etc.*

SHEILA:- No, not at all. I was just a perfectly ordinary law-abiding citizen and neither liked nor didn't like what the Government was doing, but I just put up with it. To see this body of people vigorously protesting was an eye opener. Sometimes I was quite, really quite surprised, at some of the letters we sent to the Government. Julie Henry was extremely vigorous in that campaign. I'm not sure that she was more so than others but she is the one I think of due to the letters she wrote to the various departments protesting. These would be thrashed out, of course, at meetings and then off she'd go. Julie was a very vigorous fighter for a cause, very vigorous. Did you know her?

*MATTHEW:- No.*

SHEILA:- Oh, she was and as she worked in Government Departments, she wasn't inhibited by any respect for Government Departments or people in charge. So, I enjoyed that enormously. There was a very large protest meeting held outside the old Parliament House, in front of it. We tried to remember who addressed that meeting, it was somebody well known in the community but the name escapes me. But I thought, "Isn't this inspiring to see all these people coming together because they don't approve of this operation". However, of course, we lost, didn't we? Never mind, from my point of view it was extremely interesting.

*MATTHEW:- Would it be true to say, Sheila, that NPA was a leading group in that battle against the Tower?*

SHEILA:- I think it probably was, certainly I thought it was, and I think probably it was. Yes I



think so, probably as far as the letter writing was concerned, the official protest on paper to the Government Departments, I'm sure. We were the leading, the loudest voice, but others, I'm sure the bushwalkers and others would have been part of that operation. It was not entirely National Parks, but I think we probably initiated it. I think so.

*MATTHEW:- And what was your opposition to that tower based on? What did NPA fear would be the result of that tower being built?*

SHEILA:- Mainly concern about the introduction of foreign matter, I suppose, into the Black Mountain area by additional traffic, building traffic to start with. The increase of cars bringing all types of unfavourable plant material really, seed and so on and the effect that would have on the native vegetation of Black Mountain. That would have been the main thing. I mean from personal feelings we didn't want to see a tower up on Black Mountain; we just wanted Black Mountain to be a lovely mountain. I think it really was the danger of pollution.

*MATTHEW:- Another issue that you were associated with or that NPA was involved with in your time was the Murrumbidgee River corridor and the proposed developments over the other side of the river.*

SHEILA:- Indeed, yes. Two members of the committee took really a leading part in the public protest and they were Cynthia Hook and John Shunky. I think it was Cynthia's suggestion that they write to the papers, the *Canberra Times*, about it, but instead of writing one letter, putting the reasons why we didn't want the development to go ahead, that we write a series of letters emphasising different points in each letter. That, I think, was a brilliant idea and the two of them concocted the letters; John Shunky providing perhaps valuable detailed information because he knew the countryside so well. Cynthia probably knew it in a more general way, and I think Cynthia wrote the letters. Now that was very good, and thank goodness the development didn't cross the river.

*MATTHEW:- And so NPA played quite a notable role?*

SHEILA:- Yes, it did. I can't say how much more than other people or other organisations but it certainly was a most impressive operation, I thought.

*MATTHEW:- OK, now Westbourne Woods and the golf course moving into that area, was that during your time or was that prior to you?*

SHEILA:- I think that was mostly prior to my time. I knew it went on and I can't be sure it didn't overflow into perhaps some of my time but, in my mind, we didn't take a prominent part during my time.

*MATTHEW:- And what about the Corin Forest ski development?*

SHEILA:- Yes, I certainly know about that. Probably the objection would have been for the same reason that we objected to the Black Mountain tower. Well, the fact that we thought that it was perhaps inappropriate wouldn't have been an argument, of course. We would have had better reasons, more detailed conservation reasons, of course, for protesting that.

*MATTHEW:- The extraction of water from streams to make snow?*

SHEILA:- Yes, that's right.

*MATTHEW:- And do you remember how the NPA vented its protest, again was it letter writing to the press and the Government?*

SHEILA:- Yes, it would have been. I can't remember many details about that one, but yes it certainly would have been letter writing. I can remember that much, but I'm a bit hazy about it.

*MATTHEW:- We might now go on to issues outside the ACT, other national parks in NSW nearby. Before we do that, is there anything further you want to say about conservation issues within the*



*ACT that the NPA was involved with?*

SHEILA:- Nothing comes to mind at the moment. If it does later on I'll mention it.

*MATTHEW:- Alright. Now looking around the region, Jervis Bay always seems to have been a bit of a hotbed.*

SHEILA:- Yes, it was the threat, I think, of the Government, NSW, no – yes, I don't know. Let me think about that for the moment. What was the Government planning to install there?

*MATTHEW:- Well, there were a couple of things. They started off with a nuclear power station, I think.*

SHEILA:- That's right.

*MATTHEW:- And then there was a proposal for heavy industry and even a much greater naval presence.*

SHEILA:- That's the one I couldn't remember. Oh yes, there was the usual letter writing but I don't know whether very much notice was taken by the people who got the letters; I shouldn't imagine very much. But it was a worry, wasn't it, at the time. Also, there was an extension of the Botanic Gardens at Jervis Bay and that would be one of the reasons why we were worried about the extra pollution that would come into the area. Apart from that, it's such a lovely area to have it spoiled by these enormous other operations was horrifying. Then at some stage we had to call it Jervis [*pronounced Jervis*] Bay didn't we?

*MATTHEW:- Yes, I still can't get used to it.*

SHEILA:- Unbelievable, I can't remember why that should have been.

*MATTHEW:- But in that case, Jervis Bay has been protected pretty well.*

SHEILA:- It has, yes. Protests came from organisations like National Parks and other organisations, because they would have come from all over, wouldn't they, all over NSW I think and the ACT, but perhaps not further away than that. I'm not sure whether that really had any real bearing on the decision not to proceed with those suggestions, I doubt it. But I still think it's right to protest as vigorously as you can. It has to be by letter writing.

*MATTHEW:- Now another major park quite close by is, of course, Kosciuszko; and do you recall during your time NPA voicing much concern about management of Kosciuszko or development pressures down there?*

SHEILA:- Not a great deal, no.

*MATTHEW:- For example, the 1982 Plan of Management, did NPA put in any submissions in regard to that?*

SHEILA:- Oh, I'm sure they did, yes, but I wasn't Secretary then, so I don't remember the details of that. Oh yes, they would have, yes they did. All I can say is, yes they did.

*MATTHEW:- OK, why don't we come back to Namadgi National Park and there are a couple of matters there where NPA actually got involved in work on the ground. One of the major projects first off was Orroral Homestead.*

SHEILA:- That's right. Yes.

*MATTHEW:- And I think you were involved in Den Robin's historical group.*

SHEILA:- Yes, that was very interesting. Den was really in charge of the whole operation, I think, planning the way to go about it. There was an intensive search to find out who actually built the hut, who decided it should be built and who actually built it; the firm or person who actually put it up. There were various little groups looking at certain angles. I think Den was behind that. Den



and I went down to the ANU library, the National Library I should say, one evening and by arrangement they had put out an enormous lot of books, old gazette notices and that sort of thing. We searched through those for any reference to it till we got bleary eyed, I think. I think we found one or two but that was all. Never did quite discover who actually built it, I don't know whether they have since.

*MATTHEW:- The McKeahnie family were certainly out there. It all seems to revolve around the McKeahnies.*

SHEILA:- Yes, but there was some doubt as to who it actually was who put up the hut at that stage anyway, but they might have discovered it since.

*MATTHEW:- Now, that sort of a project, that was a bit of a change of direction for NPA to actually get involved on the ground*

SHEILA:- I'm sure it was, yes it certainly was and we hadn't done anything like that before. I think the Government wasn't too sure about it at first, whether we should be allowed to do this sort of thing. I think we had quite a time convincing them that we were alright, an alright organisation to fiddle with what they considered their affairs. However, we finally won that much and there were many work parties out there as you can imagine.

*MATTHEW:- Were you involved in those?*

SHEILA:- In a very minor way, clearing up a lot of rubble outside, roundabout the hut, dragging away, tearing out weeds and digging up little bits, fragment of china and glassware. I think I was only out there working twice as I remember. On one occasion the Canberra Archaeological Society had some people out there, by invitation, our invitation. Although whether they had heard about it and approached us with some trepidation as to whether we were being careless with what might be unearthed. I know there was some discussion, but I've forgotten about that as it didn't concern me. They came along and certainly little wee fragments of pottery and ceramic material that we might have thought, "Oh that's too small a fragment" had to be very carefully placed in one spot. I think they doubted, perhaps rightly, our capabilities for recognising what was important from their point of view. But you know, it was just a nice picnic and we worked as well. But I didn't do any more than that sort of clearing up operation and I wasn't out there very often.

*MATTHEW:- So did it become an important project for NPA?*

SHEILA:- Yes it was. Yes it did, I should say. As you say it was a new venture. There was general agreement that it was criminal that an old hut with the history it had should be just allowed to decay, and a feeling of great satisfaction when we were able to get to work on it. I can't tell for how many years, you might know how many years they worked on it before they really decided they'd done all they could. They'd have working parties and the people would work like tigers, heavy work too.

*MATTHEW:- Now there have been other work parties both in Namadgi and elsewhere and I'm just wondering if you were involved in any of those, for example the 1983 tree planting at Glendale led by Charles Hill?*

SHEILA:- No, I wasn't involved in that.

*MATTHEW:- OK, during the big 1983 bushfire in Gudgenby, NPA played a role in providing meals for the fire-fighters, do you recall that, were you involved with that?*

SHEILA:- I wasn't involved in that but, I had forgotten that, yes they did. There was a lot of discussion at some stage, earlier, as I remember, about bushfire management and, of course, about controlled burning. I can remember going out. Where did we go? Not too far from Canberra. We went out one afternoon, certainly with a ranger and someone from the bushfire people looking at



areas that had been or were likely to be control burned. There again, Julie Henry was a very vigorous leader of our objection to it. One thing I can remember from it was that control burning would destroy wattles or rather wattles wouldn't regenerate after control burning because for wattle regeneration much greater heat is required. That's one fact that I remember because I hadn't known that before. Well, I don't know that we had any effect on the results. I think that controlled burning probably went on as it was considered needed by the bushfire authorities, anti-bushfire authorities I should say.

*MATTHEW:- OK. Now the NPA's also been involved in various walking-track projects. Have you been involved in any of that?*

SHEILA:- No, I haven't been involved in that. Reg Alder, as I remember, was one of the leading proponents of that and one of the leading people in planning such tracks. He'd walk over an area very thoughtfully many times before any work was done on it. I think that he just wouldn't let go.

*MATTHEW:- Yes, we'll be talking with Reg about that, the Yerrabi Track and things like that. What about down in the Budawangs, did you go down there very often?*

SHEILA:- Never, well that's not right, once, when they had what they called an ordinary National Parks walk. I was never a strong walker, never a back-packer. I didn't have the physical strength for that and so I was mostly on the easier walks. I felt I knew fairly well about the area by hearing about it. That was a very special place for bushwalkers, it probably still is. Do you know the area pretty well yourself?

*MATTHEW:- I've been there a couple of times, but I couldn't claim to know the area very well, but it is very attractive in a whole range of ways.*

SHEILA:- It was very gentle, it was a weekend camp, as I remember, a car camp which was unusual for many of the walkers who knew the Budawangs so well. Nothing like packs on your back and sleeping rough.

*MATTHEW:- Well, to talk a little bit now about outings programs of the NPA, the walking side of the organisation, what was it, do you think, you got out of it most, out of going on those trips? Was it the companionship side of things?*

SHEILA:- Being dragged up mountains that I wouldn't have thought I could possibly have managed to walk up. I think that happened many times. I was inclined, if there were alternatives, to take the easy walk, but I was persuaded that I could do the other and I found that even with, I thought, a very over-strenuous effort I managed. I think that probably.

*MATTHEW:- So it was that sense of achievement?*

SHEILA:- Great sense of achievement when I got to the top. I thought, this is much too steep for me and I shouldn't be playing with the younger people, but when you got to the top you're feeling quite exhilarated. I think that it was lovely. I said before, I was used to walking in the country and rural areas, but I wasn't used to the National Park's sort of walking, because the mountains were higher, for one thing, and steeper around here than anything I was used to tackling.

*MATTHEW:- And the bush was a lot rougher, rougher going around here, was it?*

SHEILA:- Well yes, it was. It wasn't that that would have worried me, nothing worried me, but that wouldn't have held me back, it really was the steepness. Fortunately, not the pace of walking with National Parks because there was a lot of stopping and starting, so many people had botanical interests and you would stop, then others had bird interests so you'd stop and listen, and that was good. For instance, I couldn't possibly have become a bushwalker with a bushwalker's group, ever.

*MATTHEW:- The Canberra Bushwalkers, you're talking about.*



SHEILA:- Yes. Because as I believe they just walk fast and physically I couldn't have done that. The lovely feeling of that, being out in the lovely country around here with wonderful people.

MATTHEW:- *What sort of numbers went on walks during that period? Do you have any ideas of the average size of the group?*

SHEILA:- I don't suppose I have really, but good sized groups, they varied. You said average but good sized groups on the whole.

MATTHEW:- *20?*

SHEILA:- More perhaps, more I would think. I would think more like 30 but I'm guessing a bit. Yes good sized groups.

MATTHEW:- *Then you mentioned to me last week that you went up Coree and Yankee Hat. Would you like to talk about those trips?*

SHEILA:- I'll tell you about that. There again it was a split walk, some were walking up the road and some were walking up the side, up the mountain side. I was standing with those walking up the road, but someone said to me, I think it was Fred White, "Go over there, you don't want to walk up here with us," well I said, "I suppose I'll do it". That I really found to be hard going. The first time I really found it hard going and I thought I was a fool to have tackled it. That was because I wasn't very well that morning and I hadn't had enough breakfast I think. Naturally I was at the back of the group, because I almost always was, always was if it was a mountain, and I can remember having waves of nausea every now and then, and thinking, "I am a fool". Bill Watson was keeping an eye on me, and he came down from time to time and helped me up a rocky area that I thought, "This is impossible" till I got up. I really thought, this is beyond my capabilities, I mustn't do it, but when I got to the top and stopped walking, of course, it was a wonderful feeling and I was perfectly alright.

Then another one was Yankee Hat, what I call the old Yankee Hat, because I remember Julie Henry protesting when a new map came out and the authorities had given the name Yankee Hat to another mountain. You probably know what I'm talking about. That was tough but it was alright, I didn't mind it, I quite enjoyed it, but it was tough, it was a struggle. I probably reached the top long after the first person, but that didn't matter. Coming down I can remember saying to the group I was walking with, "listen everybody, this is the toughest walk I can possibly do, Mount Coree is far too hard for me". They just roared laughing and said, well this is much harder than Coree. Well, I didn't have a clue, I couldn't measure it all, I knew Coree was a struggle and I didn't enjoy it. This might have been a struggle, but I did enjoy it. So those are the two that stand out as really testing for me.

MATTHEW:- *Are there other locations that stand out in your memory? Other places that you or the NPA used to frequent?*

SHEILA:- No, I don't think I can suggest any particular ones.

MATTHEW:- *Then were there any discernable changes in the nature of NPA walks, like the way they were led? We were talking earlier about some of Nancy's walks, where they were very instructive teaching about things.*

SHEILA:- Very instructive, yes.

MATTHEW:- *Were there many walks like that?*

SHEILA:- Not many walks like that, no. I think she was the only one who handed out any material, the only ones that were really instructive. I'm pretty sure that's right, any that I went on anyway. I went on a good number of walks, some I knew, well I suppose what I mean is, the pack walks I couldn't even consider, but most of the others I did. Like most other people I didn't make any plans for the weekend till I knew what the National Park's calendar was, didn't even



consider anything else. If there was another opportunity or invitation I just couldn't go because there was a National Park's walk on. So it really was a very important part of my life and the lives of other people.

*MATTHEW:- Were these walks recorded in the Canberra Times for example? Were they publicised more widely?*

SHEILA:- Never, never that I know of.

*MATTHEW:- So it was just the outings program as published in the NPA Bulletin?*

SHEILA:- Yes.

*MATTHEW:- Alright. Do you have any memories of particular walkers or walk leaders who you'd like to comment on, during that period, either for style or sense of humour or their contribution?*

SHEILA:- I'll have to think about that. No, I don't think so. No, I'm sure I haven't.

*MATTHEW:- We might move on to another area and that is the Bulletin itself. You were on the Bulletin committee in 1981-82, so that must have been just as you finished being Secretary?*

SHEILA:- I think I was just doing a chatty column. I think Reg [Alder] suggested or someone suggested we should have someone giving a column. I think I wrote anonymously reporting on little events, whatever we were doing, certainly I can remember writing about the Orroral work parties at one stage. I think talking about a variety of subjects, just what was happening. If possible light-hearted, it was a light-hearted column. I enjoyed doing that.

*MATTHEW:- Yes, I remember a column, I can't remember the title of it. It was either called "just a minute" or something, but it was signed by someone who called themselves, firstly I think it was Meliodora, then Snowgum.*

SHEILA:- That's right. I know Val Honey did the column for a while. I think Olive Buckman might have done it for a while. I did the first one, but it didn't occur to me to give myself a name. Who else wrote it? There must have been someone else who was writing it too, there was, but I can't remember who it was.

*MATTHEW:- Did the Bulletin change very much during your active period in the NPA?*

SHEILA:- Yes it did. Well, it changed its format after a while. When I joined it was still a little square paper, quite a small paper. I think Fiona Brand was editor when I joined the committee. Then it became (what was the size?) quarto I suppose we called it. Can't remember who followed Fiona as editor. Reg Alder was later on, I think. There was a Bruce Ward, an Englishman, who was out here in Australia, with his wife for a few years. I think he was editor for a while. Also Brian Lee was editor too.

*MATTHEW:- Sheila, we were talking about the Bulletin and how it changed over time. Do you think it got a very wide distribution in Canberra, say beyond just the membership? Was it in libraries and that sort of thing? Was there a way of getting it out to help advertise the organisation?*

SHEILA:- Yes, well certainly it was sent to the National Library; we had to send two copies, that was a regulation. Yes, there was a distribution list. We would have sent it to sister organisations I'm sure, as we would get their copies, say the Bushwalkers and the Kosciuszko Huts Association. I think we might have sent it to some schools after a while, not in the early days. I haven't thought of this in years. Yes, in general, to answer your question, it had fairly wide distribution and I think we had a grant that included the distribution of the *Bulletin* to interested bodies. I can't remember in more detail than that, in fact, I'd forgotten that much until now.

*MATTHEW:- I guess, typically of community groups, once the thing was printed, there'd be a working bee of a few members to get it packaged up and out in the mail.*



SHEILA:- Yes, there was. I did take part in those occasionally, not very often, but they were good nights too. Certainly, when I was there, everyone was enjoying doing that and it was fun, I think. There was time to talk to people in a way that there is not always time to talk at meetings; you have conversations at half-time at a meeting, I'm thinking of general meetings now. But there is such a movement at the meeting that you don't get far in the conversation when someone else joins you and you move on to something else, you know what it's like. No, they were good friendly meetings, no problem in turning up to those, but as I said, I didn't do a lot of that.

MATTHEW:- *Regarding the other publications, we talked earlier about the "Native Tree Guide" or the "Tree Guide". The one prior to that which came out during your time was Rambles around Canberra, by Alan Mortlock and Jillian O'Loughlan I think.*

SHEILA:- Yes, they handled the publication, they handled the book, getting the articles into a book. That was a very interesting operation. The people who contributed articles had, of course, to go very carefully over an area that they already knew, perhaps one of their favourite areas, and look at the area with different eyes if they were writing about it. They had to carefully time their walk, of course, because that was one of the things that would be mentioned in the article, try and estimate the difficulty or easiness of the walk, mention a very careful description of the track and directions for walking. It really was, I suppose, a very easy operation for those people who wrote articles; no matter how well they knew those walks from having done them several times, they had to walk them with a different eye and estimation. No, that was a good booklet.

MATTHEW:- *You mentioned a moment ago about the general meetings and how friendly they were. Do you remember some of the more notable speakers that came?*

SHEILA:- I think that's asking a bit much of me.

MATTHEW:- *Well, let me just mention some names, because I was quite surprised, reading through some of the earlier bulletins and annual reports, that in the early years, maybe this is before your time, people like Vincent Serventy and Judith Wright, Milo Dunphy and Frank Fenner, Ronald Straun, they'd been people who'd come to give an address. There seemed to be a special annual address that they'd put on and open to the whole community.*

SHEILA:- You're right, yes that's true, there was an annual address. I think the annual address was suggested and I'm not sure that it wasn't suggested during my time or perhaps it had just begun. I do remember Milo Dunphy, but I don't remember Judith Wright so, possibly, I didn't hear that. I might have been away as I was away a few times, overseas. Victor Serventy I can remember too. Who else did you mention?

MATTHEW:- *Ronald Straun who was from the Australian Museum then, and also Don McMichael.*

SHEILA:- I remember Don McMichael. Those were good meetings, but they petered out after a while and I'm not sure why. Whether we didn't have the money to hire the hall for them or whether we had trouble in getting the speakers we wanted, I can't remember. They were discontinued but certainly they were very, very popular at the time.

MATTHEW:- *Just looking at the general meetings themselves, do you recall how many people might come along to those, on average?*

SHEILA:- A very good attendance is about all I can say. The hall seemed to be full.

MATTHEW:- *These are the annual meetings or just the general meetings?*

SHEILA:- The general meetings, the monthly meetings according to the program, but probably depending on who was speaking or showing slides in the second half of the meeting. No, a good attendance, a very good attendance. Certainly the hall was full many times, I should think, probably frequently. We did have good speakers most of the time either with or without slides.

MATTHEW:- *As far as the age makeup of the membership, would you say that you had a good*



*mixture of younger, middle and older people there, or did it seem to be an older person's organisation?*

SHEILA:- No, it was mixed and there was something very good about it because age didn't matter. I mean, you were not conscious of the age difference, you just knew that there was. If it happened to come to your attention, you were reminded. Sometimes in conversation, you'd mention something like, "do you remember such and such" and you'd be talking to someone who's so much younger than you that, of course, they were obviously still at school at the time you were talking about. No, that was a rather remarkable thing. It happens, I've discovered in other organisations, groups that meet regularly, once they become friendly groups, the difference in age at that time of the meeting, doesn't matter, it's lost. Yes, I liked that enormously.

*MATTHEW:- Now, there were social meetings as well and I'm referring to say the Christmas parties and the President's Barbeque. Now, that's something that's no longer held. Do you remember that?*

SHEILA:- Yes, I do. Yes, why it petered out I don't know but it did. Those were good.

*MATTHEW:- Do you remember some of the venues where the Christmas party or the President's Barbeque were held?*

SHEILA:- Yes, one of my favourites was the Blue Ridge [Range]. That was a very good spot.

*MATTHEW:- At the hut, the Blue Range hut?*

SHEILA:- Yes, at the hut, the hut itself was a bit of a focus. The first two to three times, at least twice, there we were able to use the fire in the hut to cook sausages and so on. I remember that was good if you chose not to take your own meal or to augment your own meal. Another thing about them was always Ian Currie's gluhwein which could be heated inside very easily on the stove in the hut. I think that was a focus for the after meal gathering because we had some good singers, Glyn Lewis and Brian Lee were trained singers and led the carol singing which was lovely. So, where did we go after Blue Range, I've forgotten, but then a lot of the times it was at Orroral, but there were other places, but I'm not too sure where.

*MATTHEW:- That was Orroral at the camping ground there?*

SHEILA:- Yes, down by the river, lovely. Well no, not the camping ground by the river, the picnic area. I didn't miss many of those; in fact, I missed very, very few until this year.

*MATTHEW:- Now the NPA was also involved in various public events, for example there were school essay and poster competitions, and I know that in 1986 you were a judge of a poster competition run jointly by the NPA with the National Trust and the Archaeological Society in Heritage Week.*

SHEILA:- Yes, that's true. The schools might have been going when I joined, I'm not sure, but otherwise it started soon after. Fiona Brand was the leading light, she organised that and was very enthusiastic. I don't remember very much of the details of it but I certainly remember it happening. There was an enormous lot of posters came in. I think Den Robin perhaps was involved in that also.

*MATTHEW:- So, was a circular sent out to all schools that this was on and that any school could enter it?*

SHEILA:- Well, all I can say is that I'm sure it was, but that was entirely in Fiona's hands and I don't remember any of those details. She was a teacher and all I know was she handled it, very successfully too.

*MATTHEW:- I guess it would have been on certain conservation themes that these posters were arranged. Some sort of thematic subject was the subject of the posters; is that how it would have*



operated?

SHEILA:- I think it probably was, otherwise there would have been no way of measuring one against the other so someone could be judged the winner. I'm sure it was announced that someone would get first prize, second prize, and third prize. Whether there was a prize or not, I'm sure they were graded so that outstanding ones would be noted. That lasted for several years as I remember.

MATTHEW:- *I think it was something done fairly early on in the organisation's history as well.*

SHEILA:- That's why I think it was already in operation when I joined. It quite likely was.

MATTHEW:- *You mentioned there Glyn Lewis as a singer. He also, perhaps with the help of others, got together an audio-visual display in the 1970s for use either at general meetings or at public events. Do you remember that being used?*

SHEILA:- Yes, but not very clearly for some reason. I'd forgotten about that.

MATTHEW:- *Do you remember whether it consisted of slides or how it operated?*

SHEILA:- I don't think I can tell you much about that.

MATTHEW:- OK.

SHEILA:- I hadn't thought about that for years. Yes, it was quite a technical operation.

MATTHEW:- *Was it, so it would have had a sound tape as well as slides?*

SHEILA:- It did.

MATTHEW:- *Well finally then, Sheila, would you like to just finish with some reflective comments about what NPA has meant to you, and what you think NPA has achieved over its nearly 40 years? And you've known it for 30 of them.*

SHEILA:- Yes, that's true. What it has achieved is difficult to measure, isn't it, in its success with conservation issues for one thing looking at it that way. As you know, there have been some successes and many failures or perhaps half-way improvements. From my point of view, it's a wonderful organisation for the individual members to learn, for one thing from the talks that are given; to learn about the environment and to become aware of the environment that they mightn't have been before or to the extent that they hadn't been before. Some people would join simply for the walking program but by attending meetings they learned a lot of things they hadn't realized they were happy to learn. So it was educational from that point of view. I think the companionship and taking people out into the country areas is wonderful. For me it was, and I think it was for many other people. How you measure that I don't know, but I think that's important, I think from a social point of view it's important.

Any large organisation widens your horizon in getting on with people. I'd learned this before during the war, when you're mixing daily with people that you wouldn't have met before, the whole strata of personalities. In my case I learned not to judge people at first meetings or at first sight. I think an organisation like the NPA does the same thing, in mixing people from a wide range of jobs, professions, interests and because it's a talkative group, usually. I think that's important or for me it was. Difficult to say more than that, I think.

MATTHEW:- *Do you think the NPA achieved a good balance between being the sort of political side of being an advocate for conservation and then the social side if you like, although it's certainly not wholly social, of being a bushwalking group? Do you think it fulfilled those two functions well?*

SHEILA:- Yes I think so, I do think so. Getting back to the conservation side, yes it is good it evolved as an organisation that takes passionate interest in conservation and environmental



issues. Just as an individual not belonging to such an organisation, you'd have your opinions on those matters and do nothing, which most of us do. It's good to feel that you're one of a group that's really taking some action whether it's successful or not.

*MATTHEW:- So it gives individuals a voice and a rallying point?*

SHEILA:- Yes, and I've discovered that's important. Maybe you lose more of the battles than you win, I think probably you do, but maybe you reach an independent stage that in the end has some bearing on decisions. It was more towards the end of my period as Secretary that the NPA became interested or took a greater part in conservation matters and issues in general in a big way. There seemed to be smaller issues. Gudgenby was important to us, but not to the rest of the world, I think. Do you agree they have become less of a bushwalking group and more of a conservation group now?

*MATTHEW:- Well, the bushwalking side of it is certainly still there, I mean the outings program is in every issue, but certainly they look at a wide variety of issues.*

SHEILA:- Yes, I think so from reading the *Bulletin* I'm sure.

*MATTHEW:- Finally, if I could just say congratulations on winning that Order of Australia, of being awarded the Order of Australia in 1979, and I understand that was partly because of your work with CSIRO, your work with Barnardo's and your NPA involvement. Is that correct?*

SHEILA:- So I believe. I'll never forget my reaction when I got that letter, I was embarrassed and I was puzzled. I knew it was too long since I'd worked for CSIRO for them to initiate anything, and I knew National Parks never initiated anything like that. I couldn't think of an individual, so I was frightened. Certainly I was embarrassed. I can remember putting the letter away in the drawer for a couple of days until I sorted myself out, and I could only think that somebody has been kind enough to do it so I'd better say yes. It was a long time before I knew how it all came about, and that was because a friend of mine was involved over many years behind the scenes in those proceedings in an administrative way. So I really didn't know whether to, and I didn't know who to ask. I was almost too shy to ask, in case I'd ask somebody and they said "No". This was wonderful, really quite wonderful once I'd got my bearings again. Whether I ever thanked them adequately I can't remember now, it was just a fog at the time.

*MATTHEW:- Well, that brings me to the end of the questions I had in mind. Is there anything else you want to say, Sheila, before we finish?*

SHEILA:- No, I don't think so, Matthew.

*MATTHEW:- Well, thanks for your time this morning.*

SHEILA:- Well, it turned out to be a pleasure.

*MATTHEW:- Good.*