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OATLEY FLORA AND FAUNA CONSERVATION SOCIETY INCORPORATED
PERSONALITIES

THIS PAPER HAS BEEN PREPARED FOR THE OATLEY HERITAGE GROUP FOR A VERBAL PRESENTATION AT ITS MEETING 26TH FEBRUARY 2004. (IT IS TO BE ADDED TO THE PAPER TITLED OATLEY FLORA AND FAUNA CONSERVATION SOCIETY INCORPORATED PERSONALITIES, ALREADY HELD BY THE HERITAGE GROUP, DATED 22ND AUGUST 1997).

Harry WHAITE looked after our finances for 21 years (1972 - 1992). He then took on the position of Membership Officer for seven years (1993 - 1999). - a total of 25yrs continuous committee work. For 14 yrs along with his other committee tasks, Harry was also responsible for the delivery/postage of our newsletter O.F.F. News. To keep membership costs to a minimum Harry and his small band of helpers delivered the bulk of the newsletters by hand, or perhaps one should say by foot, and Harry personally walked many kilometres each month until he was 86 years of age. (it might be noted that after this time the Committee decided that they could not keep up Harry's work and these days newsletters are either posted or emailed). By 1999 Harry was in his late eighties and decided it was time to take things a little easier. However he still retains a high level of interest in the Society's activities.

Throughout his lifetime Harry has been a champion of the environment and has worked constantly at trying to maintain optimum environmental integrity. He is a staunch believer in conservation and rehabilitation .as a means of preserving habitat, which in turn helps to maintain species diversity, and tranquillity for the human soul, in short - harmony with nature.

Harry was a passionate bushwalker and photographer, walking with such identities as Paddy Pallin and Myles Dunphy. He was a member of the Warrigal (mad dog) Walking Club, however with the onset of World War 11 the club drifted apart and as Harry was in a reserved occupation he found himself walking mostly alone, mainly in the Blue Mountains area, which could be reached by train as transport in the war years was difficult. Maps of the Blue Mountains region were sketchy, the only maps being the work of Major Thomas Mitchell dated 1835. The bushwalking club, (or what was left of it), was asked to take up the challenge of mapping the area, and Harry, along with another colleague set to, mapping a section of the Blue Mountains called the Western Blue Labyrinth. Although this map was never officially published, Harry, with his extensive knowledge of the area was often consulted by such bodies as the State Emergency Service when they were requiring information for search and rescue missions, the Australian Museum and the Blue Mountains Authority. In fact the Geographical Names Board has registered, a Mount Whaite in the Blue Labyrinth area, named not by Harry but by one of his colleagues.

After WW11, as transport became more readily available the NSW and Victorian Alps could be thoroughly explored. This later proved to be an asset to Society members who spent time each summer from 1986 up until the present time bushwalking in Kosciuszko National Park. In the ¹⁹eighties and early nineties Harry

would lead us over the old trails that he remembered from long ago, and in recent years when Harry was no longer able to lead us we have used his written information and sketch maps to guide us.

In his effort to encourage conservation Harry was involved with a number of environmental organisations:

- Bouddi Park Trust, 1946-1967 when Bouddi was declared a National Park. (No doubt in part thanks to Harry)
- Bouddi Trust Advisory Committee to the National Parks and Wildlife Service 1967-1982.
- National Parks Association - foundation member, committee member for some years, walks leader and article author (membership still current)
- The Wilderness Society - foundation member (still current)
- The Total Environment Centre - (still current)
- Australian Conservation Foundation - foundation member (still current)
- National Trust of NSW (still current)
- Nature Conservation Council - after his retirement in 1975 Harry worked voluntarily for the NCC for some years. (membership current).

Other organisation to which Harry belonged included:

- The Canadian Naturalists Federation - 10yr period.
- British Astronomical Association
- The British Astronomical Association NSW branch.

As well as being environmentally passionate Harry was also community minded:

- He was Secretary to the Oatley West Public School Assembly Hall Fundraising Committee in the 1950s - the school, and the community has since enjoyed an excellent auditorium.
- Safety House Programme - for an eight year period Harry was involved in the checking process.

Members have been educated and entertained by Harry when he has presented talks and slides at meetings, and have benefited from his extensive naturalist knowledge when enjoying walks led by him. We have indeed been fortunate to number amongst our members such a remarkable man, a quiet achiever who never sought public recognition and we were very proud to nominate Harry in the year 2000 for a Hurstville Council Citizen of the Year Award. We were delighted when Harry was presented with his Achievement Award from Hurstville's Mayor at a special celebration dinner.

Alan FAIRLEY is another prominent member of our Society. Publicity Officer in 1974, President for three yrs (1975-1977) and since then he has continued as a Vice President until the present day. He had also concurrently held the position of O.F.F. News Editor from 1983- 2003. He has been a Committee Member for 29 years, (1975 - 2003), with this year, 2004, being his 30th year in office. - This makes him the longest serving Committee Member in the Society's history.

Alan's knowledge of native flora and bushland is extensive and well recognised.. He is the author of several books on native Australian flora and bushwalks around Sydney. We believe that one of his books, which is often used as a text for

horticulture students studying native plants, has been affectionately termed "the bible". -(no irreverence meant here).

For several years Alan was a member of Hurstville Council's Tree Working Party and Wetlands Forum Group, although these groups, as such, are no longer in existence Alan is often called upon by Council and community members seeking his advice or opinion.

A concerned environmentalist, Alan keeps his finger on the pulse of local, national and international issues and has kept our members informed for the past twenty years in his role as Editor of OFF News. He personally continues doggedly to do his utmost to protect our environment. Members of the Heritage Group will be aware that Alan is often seen in "the Leader" newspaper speaking out about important local environmental issues. Alan believes that balance is necessary. We cannot turn back the clock, the built environment is here to stay and will continue to grow, however the importance of protecting remnant bushland, even in backyard gardens or along nature strips is imperative in helping to achieve sustainability.

Alan is a great traveller and photographer as well as bushwalker and environmentalist and as was the case with Harry, our members have enjoyed walks led by Alan, and been educated and entertained by his talks and wonderful slide presentations.. He is one of our most noteworthy members and we were all very pleased when he was presented with a Hurstville City Council Volunteer's Award in 2002.

Valmai DOUGLAS. Is ever mindful of the need to preserve our flora, fauna, water and air quality so that future generations may enjoy a healthy lifestyle in pleasant surroundings and to this end she has been an active member of this Society for over thirty years.. Officially she was Assistant Secretary for three years (1977-1979) and Programme Officer for twenty years (1980-2001) and was responsible for arranging our monthly guest speakers, and what a superb job she did! She has an effervescent personality and could offend no one. A great asset when endeavouring to coerce professional, very highly qualified people to sometimes travel long distances and spend a lot of time preparing to speak to O.F.F. members on a purely voluntary basis.

Val is our "everything lady" the lady with the basket full of the necessities of life - the bits of string, the drawing pins, the sticky tape, spare paper ,pencils, pegs etc. she is always there, ever willing, ever ready, nothing is ever too much trouble. Even though she is no longer a member of the executive committee she is still performing the extra tasks which she set herself twenty-seven years ago. Ie. Preparing the hall and checking equipment for meeting nights, storing, maintaining, and preparing our exhibition materials such as pamphlets, posters, flora and fauna specimens (for children's touch and feel experience), children's question and answer puzzles, pictures of native flora and fauna for children to colour. These items are used at community events throughout the year, which, of course Val always attends. We could not do without her practical help, which whilst appreciated by us all is almost taken for granted, her ready smile and

bubbly personality projects the friendliness and enthusiasm of the Society's members. Thanks to Kevin Greene we were delighted to be able to present her with a Georges River Community Award in 2003.

Oatley Flora and Fauna Conservation Society is a flourishing organisation and according to our latest OFF News, (new Editor, Alan is taking a well earned rest) with over three hundred members it may be the largest community organisation of its type in Australia. There will no doubt be many more local personalities who will become involved with the Society in the future.

Compiled by Robin Dickson (Mrs) Honorary Secretary O.F.F. Conservation Society Inc.

For the Oatley Heritage Society Group meeting 26th February 2004.

(This information is correct to the best of my knowledge).