

## Black Mountain Symposium 2018 Background Paper No. 22

### Management of Black Mountain from 1930 to 2018

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**Abstract.** The ACT Government Archives were searched for material relating to the management of Black Mountain from around the mid-1900s. The archival records show the area has been managed as a reserve for almost nine decades, initially for firewood timber production (from 1930) until declared a nature reserve (in 1970). The latter followed much inter-agency government wrangling and ten years of community advocacy, especially by the National Parks Association of the ACT. Although the 1930 Firewood Reserve encompassed 1100 ha of land, the nature reserve covered only 517 ha when declared in 1970 and now has an area of only 434 ha. These changes were due mostly to excisions for public utilities such as highways and powerlines, and for institutions including the Botanic Gardens and CSIRO. The reserve's management focus has changed from predominantly firewood and erosion in 1930, to protection of natural values in 1970 to protecting both natural and cultural values today. Community involvement in the reserve is now more active and reflects a maturing cooperative relationship between the ACT Parks and Conservation Service and ParkCare groups.

#### 1. Introduction

This paper is based on a presentation given at the Black Mountain Symposium on 24 August 2018. It traces government management of Black Mountain from 1930 to the present as reflected primarily in letters, memos, reports, maps and other documents contained in the ACT Government Archives<sup>1</sup>, and provides an overview based on the following three themes:

- community advocacy to protect Black Mountain,
- legal recognition and protection of the area, and
- evolution of the area's management from 1930 to 2018.

#### 2. Community advocacy

The Black Mountain story is partly a history lesson in community advocacy to have the area protected. It is primarily about the National Parks Association of the ACT (NPA), although the Citizens' Committee for the Protection of Black Mountain, at the time led by John Hill, also played an important role<sup>2</sup>.

It took some time for the conservation values of Black Mountain to be fully recognised. In 1943 Lindsay Pryor, then acting Forester, made a file note about timber permits requiring no felling of any class of timber and only dry timber lying on the ground permitted to be removed. In 1959 the Forestry and Timber Bureau wrote to the National Capital Development Commission (NCDC) expressing concern about their take-over of Black Mountain with a qualification that they recognised that "Canberra's development must take precedence over any other work on Black Mountain". Later in 1959 NCDC reported "No clear felling, must preserve slopes" on all sides of Black Mountain, Mt Ainslie and Mt Pleasant.

The National Parks Association, established in 1960, was a constant advocate throughout the 1960s and 1970s for Black Mountain to be protected. They had to battle with a bureaucracy (mainly NCDC and the Commonwealth Department of the Interior) that was adept at passing the buck to and from each other. My name (David Shorthouse) and those of others attending the

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<sup>1</sup> A list of the archival files examined, is provided in Appendix 1. Notes on file contents are lodged with ACT Archives.

<sup>2</sup> See section 2 of Hotchin (2018).

symposium often appear in the file records for one or both sides. For example, Mark Butz (in the Department of the Interior) wrote a letter to NCDC about Black Mountain and I drafted the reply back to the department.

The archival material makes it clear that the NPA was a dogged and persistent advocate for the protection of Black Mountain. For example, in November 1960 they wrote to NCDC expressing their concern about parts of the Canberra Botanic Gardens being excised for use by the Australian National University (ANU). In November 1963 they wrote to NCDC seeking the establishment of a public reserve for Black Mountain with a Trust to plan for and manage the area; the NCDC responded that management was the responsibility of the Department of the Interior. This was the start of many years of bureaucratic buck-passing.

In 1963 the Secretary of CSIRO expressed interest in establishing Black Mountain as a Forest Reserve as a "good example of Dry Sclerophyll Forest in SE Australia than could be found anywhere within a radius of 100 miles". CSIRO supported the boundary shown on NCDC map TP 144/63 (Fig. 1) which showed the reserve would include much of what is now Bruce Ridge Nature Reserve, as Belconnen Way had not yet been built to separate it from Black Mountain. The area also included the remains of an experimental forest reserve that was the subject of much management activity from the 1930s to the 1960s<sup>3</sup>.



**Fig. 1.** NCDC map TP 144/63, showing a proposed Black Mountain Forest Reserve (from ACT Government Archives). The area coloured yellow is now part of Bruce Ridge Nature Reserve; it includes the rectangular experimental forest plots.

In June 1965 the NPA wrote to the ACT Electricity Authority about the construction of a proposed electrical substation on the lower eastern foot slopes of Black Mountain. The Authority responded that it "was not planning to do so or to have any of the reserve alienated". This was a wonderful example of bureaucratic obfuscation: both a substation and a power line were constructed later that year. However, because the substation was on land resumed from the caravan park located at the rear of what is now CSIRO, and the powerline line ran through an easement, the Authority was able to claim that it had not alienated any of the reserve—a masterful exploitation of both bureaucracy-speak and the English language!

The NPA was at times excluded from processes affecting the proposed reserve area, and was often fobbed off by the bureaucracy. For example, it was not informed about the construction of TV studios and transmitters on the mountain, a sealed road to the summit, high voltage

<sup>3</sup> See also firewood forests in section 7 of Butz (2018).

powerlines, the substation, a water reservoir and associated pipelines and suburban encroachment. In August 1965 when NPA asked if there had been any progress towards protection of the Black Mountain area, the Department of the Interior responded that "NCDC proposes the bulk of Black Mountain to be retained in a natural state" but it was "not practical to declare boundaries" as the Department was still discussing them with NCDC.

An interesting document in the files contained a list of four lessons learned by the NPA, after all their involvement and frustrations (Hill 1970). The most important lesson was to put oneself in the position of the authorities as they often have other priorities and view issues from a different standpoint. NPA also concluded that advocates must follow up every approach and not accept vague replies—a perceptive view of the bureaucratic replies they received that is still applicable today. NPA also indicated that conservationists should have answers to anticipated questions (i.e. they need to prepare for the questions they want to ask, and anticipate the answers they might receive), and get publicity. Their final lesson was that if there is no pressure from the public, the authorities will follow their own advice and do what they want to—a good reason why the community needs to keep up the pressure.

### 3. Legal recognition and protection of Black Mountain as a reserve

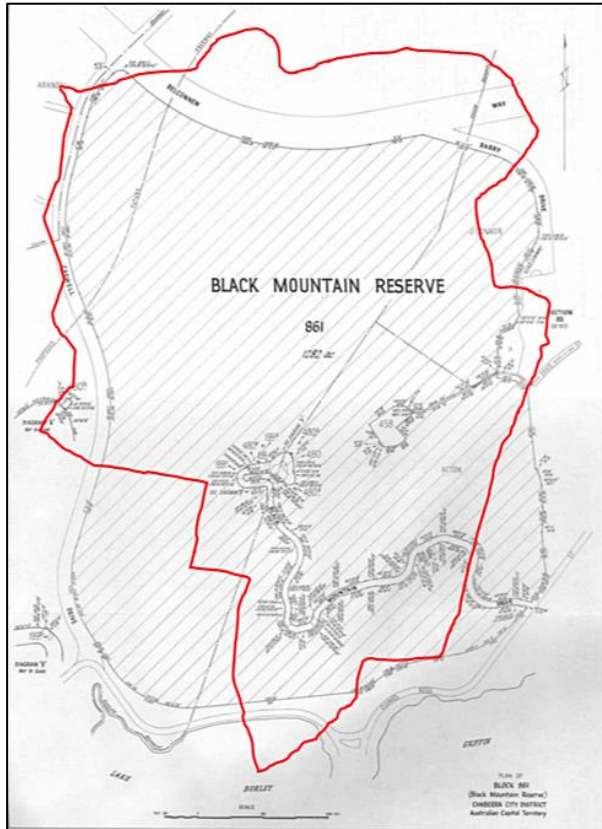
Defining a boundary to preserve Black Mountain started with the area being managed for timber production. A map contained in the file with the 1930 Firewood Management Plan (Fig. 2) showed the boundary covering an area of 1100 ha.



**Fig. 2.** Boundary of Black Mountain Firewood Reserve, from the 1930 Firewood Management Plan.

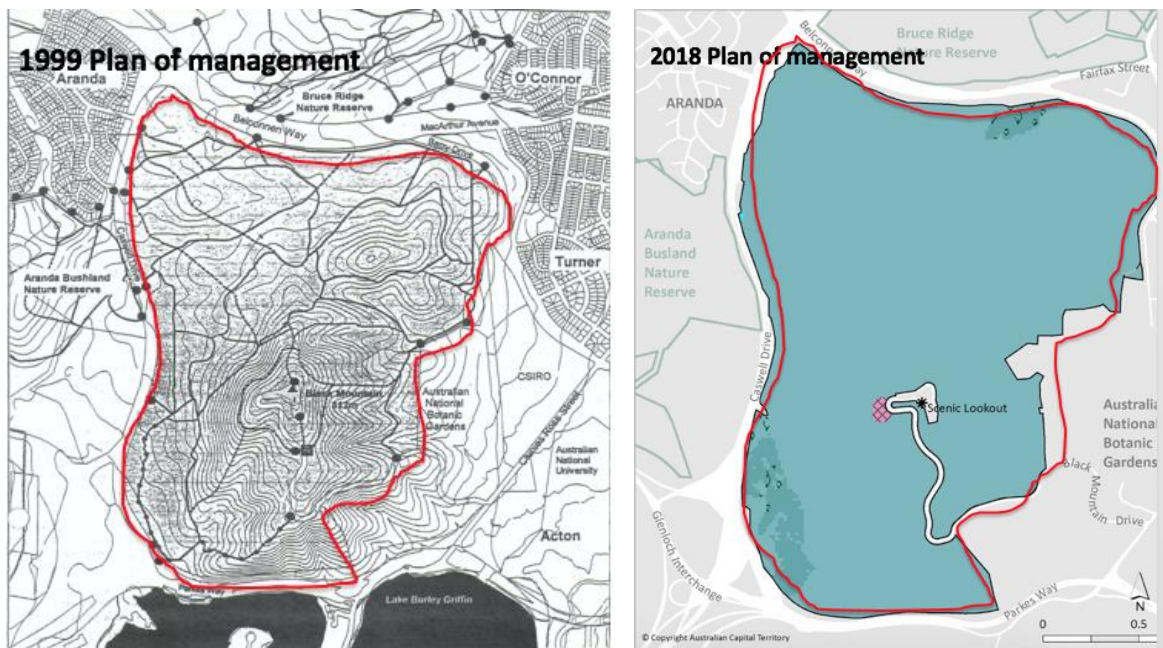
Over the following years 20% of the area was excised for the Tuggeranong Parkway, Caswell Drive alienated another 60 ha, then Belconnen Way cut off Bruce Ridge (about 100 ha). Archival documents make it clear that NCDC had a longer-term view of the boundaries: they proposed excision of areas for the botanic gardens and powerlines, and planned for freeways and other developments and usage. The area finally gazetted in 1970 under the Public Parks Ordinance (Fig. 3) and revised later under the Nature Conservation Act 1980, reflects some of these changes, with the reserve then covering only 517 ha, just less than half that identified in 1930.





**Fig. 3.** Map of Black Mountain area gazetted in 1970 under the Public Parks Ordinance (shaded with black diagonal lines); the red line shows the boundary of the 1930 Firewood Reserve.

The boundary of Black Mountain Nature Reserve in the 1999 management plan for Canberra Nature Park (CNP) (Fig. 4, left) shows the area had been reduced to 452 ha, largely reflecting excisions for the Australian National Botanic Gardens and its northern and southern annexes. The map in the 2018 CNP Plan of Management (Fig 4, right) shows small additional boundary changes, with the area further reduced to 434 ha.



**Fig. 4.** Left: boundary (red line) of Black Mountain Nature Reserve in 1999. Right: map of Black Mountain Nature Reserve in the 2018 CNP Plan of Management (green shading) compared with the 1999 boundary (red line).

#### 4. Evolution of management of Black Mountain

The first management plan located in the Archives for Black Mountain was a Firewood Management Plan covering the period 1930–1934. It was narrowly focussed, with objectives to:

- protect and improve the supply of future firewood requirements for Canberra,
- prevent inundation and erosion of the steep slopes, and
- maintain the aesthetic view of the mountain from the City Area (Civic).

This 1930s plan was a standard forest management plan that covered topics such as silvicultural systems, rotations, exploitable [timber] size, felling cycle, allowable cut and method of working. It also included fire control (noting that this was easy due to proximity to the city), presumably to protect the timber resource and manage the erosion potential. Dead wood along tracks was to be removed, piled up and then burnt, reflecting the values at the time that placed no habitat value on dead timber.

Reflecting its responsibility for management of the Territory's natural resources the Department of the Interior had already established a Tidbinbilla Advisory Committee, and in February 1970 its scope was extended to include the Black Mountain reserve. Non-government members of the committee included Harry Frith, Nancy Burbidge<sup>4</sup>, Les Caron, Doug Waterhouse, Derek Ovington and Lindsay Pryor, all well-known to both Canberra bureaucrats and conservationists. The committee immediately commenced a process for developing a management plan and adopted an interim Statement of Principles to guide management until the plan of management report, prepared by Robert Boden<sup>5</sup>, became available. The files show that the management plan went through several iterations and also indicate that in August 1973 the committee was interested in a Department of the Interior proposal that Black Mountain be managed as part of a "Nature Park"—the first mention of this concept<sup>6</sup>.

The Boden report on the plan of management was discussed by the Committee in September 1971. The plan was structured in a form that we recognise today, with a statement of purpose (Table 1), identification of values and inclusion of teaching and research functions commensurate with the long-held interest in the area by CSIRO and ANU<sup>7</sup>, and management aims reflecting these values. The plan also discussed issues that are very familiar today, including access, people management and car parking.

**Table 1.** Function, purpose and aims in the 1971 Black Mountain draft management plan

<b>Statement of function and purpose</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Preserve part of an ecosystem formerly widespread near Canberra but now altered extensively by man [sic]</li><li>• Retain a prominent visual feature in an attractive condition</li><li>• Retain a field study area suitable for biological and geological teaching to primary, secondary and tertiary educational institutions</li><li>• provide an area for ecological research that may be carried out near research organisations</li></ul>
<b>Aims for management and protection</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Maintain a mosaic of indigenous vegetation and wildlife</li><li>• Protect the inherent qualities of the Reserve</li><li>• Encourage visitor use which assists in achieving the primary purpose</li></ul>

<sup>4</sup> President of the National Parks Association at that time.

<sup>5</sup> Parks and Gardens Section, Department of the Interior.

<sup>6</sup> It subsequently led to the development of today's Canberra Nature Park.

<sup>7</sup> See Purdie (2018a, 2018b).

The 1971 draft plan estimated that five staff would be required for the reserve: an Interpretive Officer to guide school groups, prepare materials and assist with research projects; a Ranger to patrol the reserve, assist visitors and supervise maintenance and hazard reduction activities; and a Maintenance and Development Team, comprising three industrial employees, to maintain fences, gates, culverts, signage, litter collection and hazard reduction. This type of information was not included in subsequent versions of the management plan and it is doubtful that the proposed staffing level was achieved for Black Mountain alone.

In 1972 the Boden plan was subsumed into the Black Mountain Preliminary Development and Management Plan, the first official Government management plan for the declared Public Park (Elliot and Douglas 1972). It included the Canberra Botanic Gardens and proposed a major Interpretation Centre and a Reserve Headquarters with several possible locations identified on a map in the plan, which also foreshadowed an extension to the Botanic Gardens and to CSIRO. The plan also proposed that Black Mountain be declared a nature reserve under the foreshadowed Nature Conservation Act and be managed as part of the ACT and Jervis Bay Territories' nature reserve system, reflecting the growing status of the new ACT Conservation Service (which sponsored the plan).

Another 27 years elapsed before the 1972 management plan was revised. Taking 10 years to complete (over 1989–1999), it developed into a comprehensive plan that covered all 27 discrete reserves then included in CNP (ACT Government 1999). The plan documented the location, size and values of Black Mountain and each other reserve in CNP, as well as the existing levels of use, potential demands for use, and capacity to provide for a range of uses. The plan provided for each component reserve to be zoned into one or more of four zone types each with a different emphasis (Multiple Use; Facilities; Intensive Recreation and Tourism; and Urban Edge Buffer). A strategy was developed for each reserve that summarised its values, features, facilities, fire history, exotic species and vegetation. Over-arching management objectives, management actions and priorities were also articulated in the plan for CNP as a whole. The plan also outlined opportunities for volunteer participation in recognition of the growing interest in community involvement through ParkCare groups.

The plan of management for Black Mountain was revised again in 2018, again as part of a plan for the whole of CNP and using a 'modern' readable framework. Although not released at the time of the symposium, this 2018 plan includes up-to-date records of threatened species, the diversity of plants and animals, concepts of connectivity with nearby units of CNP and a hierarchy of objectives and actions applying generically to the whole CNP system. The 2018 plan also includes a brief but more comprehensive statement (compared with previous plans) of both the natural and cultural values of each component reserve (see Table 2 and Fig. 5). These values in turn are reflected in the key management actions which continue to reference the community's role and participation (Table 3) not only in terms of what they can do to help but also in the terms of the Parks and Conservation Service actually supporting this interest.

The evolution of public statements of Black Mountain's resource values and management priorities since 1930 is summarised in Table 4. Over this period the total area within the reserve's boundaries has been reduced from 1100 ha in 1930, when forest production values were pre-eminent, to 517 ha in 1970, when the focus had changed to protection of its conservation values, to 434 ha today (less than half the 1930 area). Natural values were barely mentioned in 1930, rated a brief description in 1970 and were covered in more detail subsequently. Cultural values were not mentioned until 1999, when they rated a brief mention, but are included in a comprehensive statement in the 2018 plan. The increasing recognition of Black Mountain's natural and cultural values over the decades probably reflected both an improved knowledge base and the increased sophistication of the community's value system. Public access was not included in 1930, rated a brief mention in 1970 and 1972, but gained more prominence as a key management issue in 1999 and 2018, probably reflecting greater demands for and concern about public recreational use. Aesthetic values have been recognised since 1930, but mentioned only briefly in each document. Although staff requirements were included in 1930 and 1970, their

absence in subsequent plans in part reflects the complexity of management requirements and priorities and a reluctance by Government to make commitments in this regard.

**Table 2.** Summary of Black Mountain values included in the 2018 Canberra Nature Park Plan of Management

Topic	Natural values
Geology	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• sandstone</li> </ul>
Plants	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• rich shrub and herb diversity (including more than 60 orchid species)</li> <li>• 40 nationally and regionally rare species</li> </ul>
Vegetation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• significant areas of old growth dry forest</li> </ul>
Birds	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• several threatened or declining nomadic or migratory species</li> </ul>
Research & teaching	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• important for ecological studies into soil, fire, plants and animals</li> <li>• type locality of many invertebrate species</li> <li>• 40 nationally and regionally rare species</li> <li>• geological formation</li> </ul>
Topic	Cultural values
Aboriginal values	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• significant place for Aboriginal people (31 Heritage Listed sites)</li> <li>• gathering place before travelling to the mountains</li> </ul>
City landmark	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• landmark for Canberra city</li> <li>• a key feature in the Griffin design for the national capital</li> </ul>
Building resource	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• quarry provided a source of rocks for St John's Church and other buildings</li> </ul>



**Fig. 5.** Canberra Nature Park signs on Black Mountain, erected in May 2018 reflect the increased focus on Aboriginal values of the area and community involvement in the reserve's management.

**Table 3.** Key management actions for Black Mountain in the 2018 Canberra Nature Park Plan of Management

Topic	Key action
Natural values	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>maintain the reserve's rich biodiversity, focussing on orchid populations, old growth forest and structural habitat for a range of species</li> <li>undertake action to avoid further spread of <i>Phytophthora cinnamomi</i></li> </ul>
Recreation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>review and improve signage, rationalise tracks and monitor increased recreation</li> </ul>
Community involvement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>continue to support the Friends of Black Mountain</li> </ul>

**Table 4.** Comparison of Black Mountain's management as reflected in various management documents

Year	1930	1970	1972	1999	2018
Source document	Chief Forester PoM <sup>1</sup>	Boden report	Dept Capital Territory PoM	Environment ACT PoM	ESPDD <sup>2</sup> PoM
Area (ha)	1100	517	518	452	434
Area (acres)	(2720)	(1280)	(1282)	(1116)	(1072)
Focus	Forest production	Conservation	Conservation	Conservation	Conservation
Natural values	×	✓	✓✓	✓	✓✓✓
Cultural values	×	×	×	✓	✓✓✓
Access	×	✓✓	✓✓	✓✓	✓✓
Aesthetics	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Staff numbers	1.6	5	Not mentioned	Not mentioned	Not mentioned
Pages	25	35	48	166 <sup>3</sup>	>180 <sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> PoM = Plan of Management.

<sup>2</sup> Environment & Sustainable Planning and Development Directorate.

<sup>3</sup> The total number of pages for the whole of Canberra Nature Park; Black Mountain is specifically covered in two pages in the 2018 PoM.

## 5. Conclusions

When reviewing the history of recognising and protecting the natural and cultural values of Black Mountain since 1930, there is good reason to conclude: the area of Black Mountain protected and reserved for future generations should not be reduced any further. Rather, with the growth of urban infrastructure and residential developments it is now important to focus on Black Mountain's connectivity with other units of Canberra Nature Park and Lake Burley Griffin and to manage the impacts and edge effects that arise from the adjacent suburbs.

The importance of community vigilance has been shown repeatedly, from the dogged pursuit of protection of the area by the National Parks Association to the active and maturing cooperative relationship between the ACT Parks and Conservation Service and ParkCare groups including the Friends of Black Mountain, the latter increasingly harnessing considerable expertise and potential to carry out on-ground activities.

Finally, the Canberra community needs to adopt a more proactive approach to management of Black Mountain (and other parts of CNP) as the effects of climate change become more apparent, to coping with an ever-increasing demand for access and changing mode of access, and how to



develop community ownership of monitoring environmental change and including citizen science projects.

## **6. Acknowledgments**

My thanks to Archives ACT for their assistance, especially from Linda Weller and Anne Paliaga who were very helpful in getting out files and numerous maps, and at the very end producing a file with a plan of management for Black Mountain dated 1930–1934. Thanks also to Trish Bootes, ACT Parks and Conservation Service for access to the yet-to-be published Plan of Management for Canberra Nature Park (which includes Black Mountain). Special thanks to Rosemary Purdie who undertook transcription of my talk.

## **7. References**

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- Purdie, RW (2018a) Scientific collecting, monitoring and research on Black Mountain. Black Mountain Symposium Background Paper No 16. Friends of Black Mountain, Canberra.
- Purdie, RW (2018b) Black Mountain educational, recreational and creative activities. Black Mountain Symposium Background Paper No 17. Friends of Black Mountain, Canberra.

## Appendix 1

### Government and National Capital Development Commission (NCDC) files (archived) consulted for this paper

<b>Organisation</b>	<b>File Number</b>	<b>File Name</b>
Department of the Interior	29/269/F	
Parks and Gardens Section	63/99	PMG camp – Black Mountain Firewood Reserve
Department of the Interior	67/3098	Black Mountain Area, Development of
Department of the Interior	69/104	Parks and Gardens
Department of the Interior	73/1556F	TNR and BM Reserves Advisory Committee
Agriculture Branch	70/5	Black Mountain reserve and surrounding areas
Agriculture Branch	70/67	Advisory Panel TNR and Black Mountain Reserve
Business Leases	78/476	Application to operate cable car
NCDC	66/4087	Black Mountain, development of
NCDC	SP 1173	1968–1974
NCDC	70/84	Black Mountain committee
NCDC	72/907	Black Mountain landscape development
NCDC	84/2012	Firewood plantations in the ACT
NCDC	SP 15393 pt 1&2	1986–1988
NCDC	70/63	Black Mountain open space