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TALKING ABOUT NATIONAL PARKS intentions, making places and history in NSW and WA

I have been greatly influenced in my thesis research by Paul Carter's spatial history *The Road to Botany Bay*, and particularly his emphasis on intentions and place-naming¹. It is the role of intention in the making of places that I wish to briefly explore in this paper, and particularly the intentions of the makers of national parks in New South Wales and Western Australia.

I. Intentions

The 'facts' of any history of national parks are not the parks as such, or physical sites within them. Rather, the 'facts' are phenomena as articulated by the park-maker, as they are invented by the park-makers intentions. A place name such as 'National Park' is a metaphorical way of speaking, indicating the cultural space where history begins - not at some particular place or time, but in the act of naming. It is by the act of place-naming that a space is symbolically transformed into a place. A place is a space with a past. The strategic use of place names is integral to the discursive transformation of spaces on maps into objects of knowledge.

Carter has commented upon the use of ideas about strategy and military manoeuvring as a metaphor of exploration². A strategy, in the sense of imposing the preferred time, place and conditions for encountering the Other, was used by the park-maker to translate a space into a conceivable object that the mind could possess long before the park visitors began to arrive.

¹Carter, P., The Road to Botany Bay: an essay in spatial history, Faber & Faber, London and Boston, 1987.

²*ibid*: 114-115.

Both the particularising element 'national' and the class-name 'park' are figurative and non-factual. The name National Park brought into being an object of invented spatial and temporal co-ordinates within which history could occur. Class-names such as park, common and forest do not reflect what was already there. Rather, they differentiate the landscape so that it can be written about and read. They are descriptive of places where things could happen and become history.

The national parks that emerged from the park-makers pen were not physical objects, but objects of desire, figures of speech describing the writer's intentional gaze. The park-maker used gazettal notices in the *Government Gazette* as the appropriate instruments to invent a network of class-names that facilitated settlement. There were commons, parks, national parks, state forests, game reserves and nature reserves, to name a few. Thus were spaces ordered and rendered conceptually and culturally visible.

The surveyor, with the invention of an omnipresent viewpoint, aimed to centralise the features of the landscape by arranging them into distinct regions. The gazettable descriptions produced by the park-maker were a form of spatial interview which made the landscape answer the invader's need for information. The words of description were instruments of cultural conquest rather than scientific observations, preparing pathways for orderly colonisation and the presentation of a known past.

II. Making Places

Carter has remarked upon the paucity of contemporary records marking the transition between the naming and the inhabiting of a place³. This observation seems to hold for communal places, where the early years of communal settling seem to have been beyond gazettable description. The symbolic boundary between 'culture' and 'nature' in communal places such as commons facilitated communication. It was a place of dialogue where differences could be negotiated, and the invention of a language of place facilitated. The development of commons in New South Wales can be used to illustrate this point.

The common-maker had named the space, described its boundaries and given it a history, but the process of continuing that history into the future was often marked by a hiatus of some years. While the class-name 'common' could be transported from England, only some of the language of 'commonage' survived the journey. Rights to estover, herbage, pannage,

³ibid: 149-151.

pasturage, piscary, sheepwalks, turbary and vesture were apparently upheld in 1805, but by the 1850s, when common accounts began to appear in the NSW *Government Gazette*, they are dominated by a language of grazing and timber-getting⁴.

The commons of the Sydney region were invented by gazettal in 1804 and 1805, but then fall silent in the literature of gazettal until the 1840s⁵. Even retrospective financial histories gazetted in the 1850s can only reach back to the 1830s. The absence of written accounts can be explained by saying that it is not only a communal resource that has to be invented, but a language of the place as well. The process of making commons was as much a process of symbolically bringing the place into being as it was of shepherding flocks or gathering firewood.

Initially, the common was indistinguishable on the ground from the surrounding landscape. The commoners had to agree upon where to physically begin making their common, upon where 'here' was to begin. They had to negotiate over what rights-of-common were to be spoken about, and so recognised 'here' as custom. They had to invent a language of place within that boundary space. It gave them something to talk about, even if that talk was not always friendly, as the references to litigation during the 1840s seems to suggest⁶. It is a significant point that by the 1850s, several of the 1804 commons had been privatised, while all those that remained had changed their particular names - only the class-name 'common' survived. That the language of commons in NSW remained open to negotiation can be illustrated by the distance between the making of the *Crown Lands Alienation Act* of 1861 and the gazettal of the first common made under its authority in 1865 at Bathurst⁷.

The situation with national parks is similar, although the absence of commoners meant that the invention of a language of place took place between the park-maker and a small group of gentleman trustees. Whereas the class-name 'common' required the presence of commoners for language-making, the class-name 'park' reflected a different intention, an intention that has perhaps been hidden by its strategic coupling with the particular name 'National'.

⁴Government Gazette New South Wales, 20.1.1854: 164; 16.1.1855: 155; 25.1.1856: 238-341 for example.

⁵Sydney Gazette, 12.8.1804: 1; 20.1.1805: 1.

⁶Government Gazette New South Wales, 29.1.1856: 255 for example.

⁷Government Gazette New South Wales, 10.1.1865: 69

By 1879, there had been a persistent debate in New South Wales that involved the use of the term 'national'. The National System of schooling had been introduced in Ireland in 1831, and to New South Wales in 1848. One of its fundamental principals was that children of all religious denominations could be admitted to the same local school and taught those sections of scripture common to all Christian faiths. Amongst the aims of the National system was the promotion of harmony and good-will between denominations. The word 'National', in this context, was an attempt to subvert the apparent permanency of sectarian differences by defining people according to their place of residence rather than religious belief.

The *Public Schools Act* of 1866 renamed the National Schools as Public Schools, and the term National School passed from the language of places. It remained, however, firmly within the discourse on public education. The Public School League was formed in Sydney in 1874 to lobby for "...national, free, secular and compulsory..." schooling. The League's "...first and chief aim ... is to make education universal by adopting a national and uniform system...". The meaning of the word 'national' had undergone a subtle change between the 1850s and 1870s. It now contained some idea of an equality of opportunity, regardless of denomination or residence, in attaining a basic education, an education shaped by a 'national', rather than sectarian, curriculum that would promote the 'national' development of the colonial community.

A NSW Government Gazette supplement in April 1879 consisted entirely of notices reserving from sale various portions of Crown Land for various public purposes. Amongst the water supply, access to water and camping reserves was 7 300 hectares "reserved from sale for a National Park". A name had been invented that strategically characterised a 'national' place as publicly accessible, state owned, and free of the religious divisions of settler society. Nature had been transformed into culture by naming and describing in the Gazette a place named 'national park'. It is the intentional linking of the word 'national' with the word 'park', however, that for me raises questions about the apparently objective term 'park'

The English 'historical ecologist' Oliver Rackham has provided a genealogy of the park in England, locating its origins in private medieval enclosures for

⁸'Manifesto of the New South Wales Public School League for Making Primary Education National, Secular, Compulsory and Free', Sydney Morning Herald, 22.9.1874; reprinted in Barcan, A., A Short History of Education in New South Wales, Martindale Press, Sydney 1965: 153-154.

⁹Government Gazette New South Wales, Friday, 4.4.1879: 1591.

the keeping of semi-wild animals, notably deer¹⁰. Park economics were dominated by the need for fences, and a compact outline and rounded corners became the characteristic park shape. Parks usually had multiple uses such as woodland, stock raising, arable meadows and commonage. The 'parkland' combination of grassland, scattered trees and lodges was common but not universal, The medieval park was a utilitarian enterprise. Many were converted into landscape parks in the 17th and 18th centuries, and into municipal parks during the 19th century. I am using Rackham's account to indicate what features the colonial park-maker may have thought characterised a 'park', and so could differentiate it in the landscape. The naming of the first national park in WA provides an interesting example for exploring the associative and metaphorical meanings of the word 'park' around the turn of the century.

Baron von Müeller, addressing the Australasian Association for the Advancement of Science in 1890, argued for the making of 'floral commons'

Choice areas, not necessarily very extensive, should be reserved ... for some maintenance of the original vegetation and therewith for the preservation of animal life ... Such spots should be proclaimed at all times the people's inalienable property ... to such places of security should be transferred plants and animals of exceptional rarity.¹¹

In 1894 the Western Australian government, at the urging of the WA Natural History Society, set aside the colony's first nature reserve when The Flora and Fauna Reserve of 64 750 hectares in the southern Darling Ranges was gazetted¹². In 1897, the Lands Department began to receive applications to cut timber in the reserve. The Minister for Lands, George Throssell, proposed that 20 000 hectares be retained as a 'permanent reserve' and the rest given over to logging. He stated in a memo

There will come a day, if we do not take care, when an ancient tree will be a thing of the past, and the land selected for the permanent reserve should contain some of the noblest trees existing in the whole area, so that in days to come when the land is fenced and improved and becomes a resort, those coming after us can see what noble trees the colony possesses. You will readily see that this should be <u>one</u> of our motives 'the objects of the reserve', for the effect of throwing open the

¹⁰Rackham, O., Trees and Woodland in the British Landscape, London 1976: 144

¹¹Baron von Müeller, Presidential Address to the Australasian Association for the Advancement of Science, Melbourne, 1890, in Powell, J., Environmental Management in Australia, 1788-1914: guardians, improvers and profit - an introductory survey, Melbourne 1976: 122

¹²Government Gazette Western Australia, 6.2.1894: 194

area for cutting purposes would be that not a solitary magnificent tree would be left to tell the tale.¹³

Throssell's statement reflects the influence of von Müeller's taxonomical concept of 'floral commons' - permanent reservation and the preservation of curios - and the 'resort' needs of the old colonial élite. The Conservator of Forests, John Ednie-Brown recognised this and recommended that the 20 000 hectares least accessible to timber cutters and stock in the northeast corner of the reserve should be retained and dedicated as a National Park¹⁴. In the meantime, Throssell was being lobbied by the WA Acclimatisation Committee to retain a larger, more accessible area in which the Committee intended to naturalise deer and other exotic animals¹⁵. Premier John Forrest observed that he

would not reserve good Timber country for this purpose - there is plenty of country without good Jarrah that would do for the reserve... ¹⁶ Following this lead, the bureaucrats developed their own language of the 'floral common' in the form of small public reserves for the preservation of particular wildflowers: Boronia in 1899 and 1905, Pitcher Plant in 1908, and Red Flowering Gum in 1928 are examples.¹⁷

Nevertheless, Throssell gained Cabinet approval of his proposed 20 000 hectare National Park, and the plan was referred to the Executive Council for the Governor's approval. At this late stage Forrest initiated a discussion as to whether the reserve should be named the 'National Park', and was able to have the matter deferred pending further investigation¹⁸. A hurried survey of the area was undertaken which elicited the significant information that the proposed national park contained no permanent water. This, in effect, prevented any significant arrangement of geographical features being gazetted that could be characterised as the intended 'park'.

Throssell then proposed that a "very careful inspection" of the whole of The Flora and Fauna Reserve be carried out according to a set of criteria he had devised. These were that the colony's National Park must contain a diversity of trees, from which mature trees could be removed under proper

¹³memo from George Throssell to R. Cecil Clifton, 15.11.1897, in 'Areas for Native Flora and Fauna', State Archives of Western Australia, AN 3/19, Acc. 1755, L&S File 2507/93, Vol. I.

¹⁴memo from J. Ednie-Brown to R. Cecil Clifton, 5.2.1898, in ibid.

¹⁵memo from G. Throssell to R. Cecil Clifton, 18.2.1898, in ibid.

¹⁶memo from Forrest to Throssell, 15.4.1898, in *ibid*.

¹⁷Government Gazette Western Australia, 9.9.1899: 3153; 2.12.1905: 3740; 11.12.1908: 3380; 10.8.1928: 1809

¹⁸memo from Executive Council Secretary to Throssell, 26.5.1898, in *Areas for Native Flora...*, op. cit.

supervision, be easily accessible to the public in the future, be suitable for acclimatisation of deer, and be worth fencing as a permanent park¹⁹. Presumably a permanent supply of water was also essential!

Permanent water, in the form of waterfalls, could be found in the hills behind Perth, and in 1900, Forrest told Throssell that "I should like a National Park reserved above the tunnel on the Eastern Railway, a beauty spot". Throssell replied that "I think we have anticipated this request by making reserves to include the waterfalls in this locality" The voices of the loggers, the acclimatisers, the scientists and the gentry tourists can be heard in these discussions of what a park, and especially a national park, should be in Western Australia.

In 1902, the Surveyor-General advised the Under Secretary for Lands that the new water catchment reserves in the northern Darling Ranges could also serve as flora and fauna reserves, as the government had prohibited settlement within them²¹. Several reserves had already been made within or adjacent to the catchment reserves, notably the Swan View Public Park of 50 hectares in 1895 and the Swan Park Lands of 1 300 hectares in 1898²². These were the 'waterfall reserves' alluded to by Throssell. In 1900 Swan Park Lands was gazetted as a permanent reserve, followed by Swan View Public Park in 1901²³, which by 1908 had become Swan View Park Land²⁴

An examination of gazettals around this time indicates that a 'public park' was intended to have a certain cultivated or gardenesque atmosphere, while a 'park lands' was intended as a larger, picturesque and perhaps more 'noble' place²⁵. These linkages of the class-name 'park' with either a prefix 'public' or a suffix 'land' associated different pasts and therefore different futures with

¹⁹memo from Throssell to Clifton, 8.9.1898, in ibid.

²⁰memo from Forrest to Throssell, 26.8.1900; Throssell to R. Cecil Clifton, 28.8.1900, L&S file No. 10617/99, quoted in Hall, C.M., The 'Worthless Lands Hypothesis' and Australia's National Parks and Reserves, in Frawley, K.J., and Semple, N.M., (Eds) Australia's Ever Changing Forests: proceedings of the first national conference on Australian Forest History, Canberra, 9-11 May 1988, UNSW/ADFA, Canberra, 1988: 446.

²¹memo from Surveyor-General Johnston to Under Secretary R. Cecil Clifton, 15.8.1902, in *Areas for Native Flora ...*, op. cit.

²²Government Gazette Western Australia,

²³Government gazette Western Australia,

²⁴Government Gazette Western Australia, 25.9.1908: 2593.

²⁵for a discussion of the gardenesque-picturesque dichotomy see: Burton, C., 'A History of Urban Parks in New South Wales', in Close, E., & Beaver, D., (Eds) *Urban Parks of Heritage Significance: a collection of essays on the history, conservation and management of urban parks*, National Trust of Australia (NSW)/Australian Government Publishing Service, Sydney 1993: 11-15.

the places that they named. The choice of place name was not a random act, but a deliberate taxonomic decision in each case that is part of a wider attempt to possess the country by naming its increasingly subdivided spaces. Making these choices acts as a metaphor for the diverging intentions and changing power relations within the state's ruling élite.

By 1907, part of The Flora and Fauna Reserve had been leased to a timber company, and pressure for more leases was mounting. The Natural History Society again pleaded with the incumbent Lands Minister to vest the reserve in trustees and gazette it has a national park²⁶. The Society continued to lobby for the retention of The Flora and Fauna Reserve as a national park, and emphasised the protection of large uncultivated areas for the preservation of wildlife:

...reasons ... are ... [that] (so many native animals are becoming rare, and others almost, if not quite, extinct) and are clearly set forth in ... the Convention signed in London for the Preservation of Wild Animals, Birds and Fish in Africa. ...the extent of the protected areas then declared is enormous. Nor is it needful to call attention to the Reserves of the Eastern States and New Zealand, to the numerous Reserves, including several islands, made in the United States of America since 1900, although that country with an area only three and a half times of Western Australia had already a National Park fourteen times as large as the one we ask.²⁷

The Premier, however, seeing through very different eyes, would "...certainly not look upon [these gentlemen] as being capable of expressing an opinion as to the extent and quality of the forests of [The Flora and Fauna Reserve]."28.

The Society then asked for Barrow Island, Bernier or Dorre Island and Mondrain Island, on the north, west and south coasts respectively, and each the habitat of a rare native animal, to be reserved and included, with The Flora and Fauna Reserve, in A National Park. When the Society spoke about a national park, they meant a place that was geographically large, where indigenous animals were protected by regulation, and that was comparable to similar parks elsewhere in (Anglo) world. They also understood that the park could be made up of several geographically separated areas, and favoured those places such as islands which had a secure boundary. They

²⁶letter from Bishop of Perth, President of the Natural History Society, and Vice-presidents Cecil Andrews (Inspector-General of Education) and Bernard Woodward (Director, WA Museum) to Newton Moore, Lands Minister and Premier, 9.8.1907, in *Areas for Native Flora* ..., op. cit.

 $^{^{27}}ibid$.

²⁸memo, N. Moore to R. Cecil Clifton, 28.8.1907, in ibid.

argued that a park should be protected by law and that it should be managed and controlled by trustees.

In 1913 a large 109 255 hectare reserve was gazetted for a 'National Park' in the Stirling Ranges²⁹. The earliest gazetted reference to the Swan Park Land as the 'National Park' was two years later in 1915³⁰, and by the end of that year, the National Park was made up of a number of separate reserves, including the Swan View Park Land, Swan Park Land and Stirling Range Reserve. This arrangement offered resident plants and wildlife some legal protection, was comparable to some other parks in total size, and had some limited security offered by 'permanent reserve' status. Control of the National Park, however, was not unified, with jurisdiction over its constituent reserves varying over place and time between a succession of state agencies and local authorities³¹. In agreeing to talk about 'parks', and especially THE 'national park' in this way, a pattern was set that persisted in WA until about the late 1940s.

III. History

In conclusion, a focus on the intentions of park-makers and the making of a language of place can elicit some understanding of what was intended when a place was named, and therefore invented, as the 'national park'.

The particular name 'national' was associated with the characterisation of a place as publicly accessible, owned by the state, and free of sectarian divisions. By linking it with the class-name 'park', early park-makers in NSW such as James Hoskins and John Robertson made a strategic move that mapped a new landscape, and determined that settlement within a region named 'national park' could not be exclusive, private or separatist.

The class-name 'park' had the potential to characterise a place as exclusive and privately owned, but also as a place for the preservation of plant and animal curiosities and as a place of picturesque landscapes, qualities emphasised by Throssell. State ownership of parks was not contested, although a certain degree of exclusivity was still envisaged. Von Müeller thought that his floral commons should be open only to the "...orderly section of the public", and it was only 'gentlemen' that Robertson appointed as trustees to the National Park in NSW.

²⁹Government Gazette Western Australia, Friday 6.6.1913: 1980.

³⁰Government Gazette Western Australia, Friday, 28.5.1915: 1761 - the gazettal notice added 46 hectares "...to form portion of the National Park...(near Swan View)".

³¹Government Gazette Western Australia, Friday, 11.6.1915: 1842; Friday 31.1.1928: 39

The name 'National Park' was used to describe a regionalisation of geographical objects wherein 'natural beauty' could be enjoyed, where natural curiosities could be gathered together and scientifically studied, and where some of the leisure needs of holiday-makers could be fulfilled.

Nature conservation has not always been the purpose of national parks, as a reading of the current definitions of national parks used by national park agencies would imply. The national park is not a topographical given as some national park historians have tended to assume. National parks continue to be made and remade over time and space: they are not static, pristine objects in the landscape that things happen to or in. The meaning of the place name 'national park' has always been in a state of flux and negotiation, and always will be.

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