

Blue Mountains: Bush Or Suburbia?

By *The Australian*
03.07.1974
JOHN HALLOWS

THE Blue Mountains, our most historic area of wilderness, is under siege from Sydney.

Traffic bound for the city sometimes blocks up the Great Western Highway bumper-to-bumper for the entire 70 kilometres length of its painfully winding progress through the mountains. Since nearly 90 per cent of the population live in ribbon developments along the road, one leviathan lorry having trouble making the grades at 3 o'clock in the morning can wake up practically everyone in the Blue Mountains.

Sydney commuters press for living space — 75 per cent of workers in the lower Blue Mountains commute outside the area to work — and city developers press for permission to build flats to house them in. Sub-dividers win planning appeals for 5-acre block development, even in scenic areas like Mount Wilson just last week, with monotonous regularity.

Day-trip tourists flock in, scattering litter but very little cash: 65 per cent of all visitors drive up for the day and spend less than \$10 during their visit. They complain about the roads but make virtually no contribution to the local economy which helps maintain them — and deals with the resultant litter and pollution problems.

Meanwhile young people flock out to the big city on the plains below, dissatisfied with mountain employment opportunity and life prospects.

Now the prospect looms of an even worse threat: the emergence of Bathurst-Orange at the other end of the Great Western Highway, as a regional growth centre. The highway is the only conceivable road route between the Sydney metropolis and the proposed new regional centre. The likelihood of a major expansion of traffic on it promises serious disruption to the little mountain towns, every one of which straggles along its kerbs.

FACED WITH FIVE PLANS

Faced with threats to the mountains' future on all sides, the Blue Mountains City Council got itself a grant from the Federal Department of Urban and Regional Development and hired a consultant to write a plan for them.

Last night the results were released, and the Blue Mountains found itself faced not so much with a plan as a problem: five alternative plans, with the choice between them to be made by the people of the area and their council.

In previous Australian town planning, the planners first defined an optimum future for the area under discussion and then suggested strategies designed to lead towards it. But in the troubled future of the Blue Mountains, the plan-

ners found too many conflicts to be resolved by a group of outside experts sitting in a city office.

"The conflicts," says Mikel Bell of the Urban Systems Corporation planning team, "are in really vital areas. They are over things like the desire to conserve the natural environment as against the great advantages that could be obtained by boosting population and bringing in some industry to increase employment opportunities."

"They involve fundamental choices about what sort of place the Blue Mountains is going to be in the future. And those major choices have to be made by the community, as a piece of participative."

"So we decided, rather than lay down the objectives, that we would offer the Blue Mountains the alternatives before them and spell out what each option would require in terms of action and investment, and what sort of future it would imply."

CONSERVATION

Vs URBANISATION

"Now the object must be to involve the people of the area on the basis of this information in the decision about the path the area is to take."

The options range from Alternative One — basically a "no-growth" policy with population held to virtually its present level — to the maximisation of population and employment opportunity in Alternative Five. In between are gradations of emphasis between the conservation and urbanisation strategies.

The problem is that none of the alternatives adds up to a particularly comfortable option.

Alternative One would provide for a population capacity of 47,000, compared to the present population of around 40,000. It would forbid urban development outside present boundaries, prevent flat-building, keep residential densities low. There would be little spending on transport facilities outside that required to cope with through traffic and for tourist access.

But in order to protect the natural environment and keep down the population level there would need to be a massive program to buy back undeveloped private land, including some blocks on which there is already planning permission for development.

And the cost of that is estimated at \$50 million the council doesn't have. On the face of things at the moment, DURD does not appear to have the powers to make a grant for this specific purpose. Although other development costs under this alternative would be far lower than in

any of the others, unless Canberra can find a devious way through the obstacles to provide the money, the alternative would be impossible: without the re-acquisition program, the population could not be held down.

Allowing the population to rise to 65,000, according to the plan's Alternative Two, would mean greater pressure on the environment. It would also require considerable spending on the railway line to Sydney, more car parking facilities at stations, an increase in local bus services, two extra primary schools, four more health centres and a new town centre at Springwood.

The last State Planning Authority projection for the area suggested that the population could reach 85,000 by the end of the century, half the maximum possible under the statutory plan for the mountains.

But according to the strategic plan's alternative three, the cost of a 112,000 population would be over-use of recreational areas, land pressures, a bush fire danger and pollution in many stream systems.

It would also require much heavier spending on the railway link, extra work on the Great Western Highway and \$25 million worth of improvements to public utility services. Three new town centres would need to be built, six new smaller centres in the upper mountains, plus eight new State high schools, 16 primary schools, a technical college and a rash of health centres.

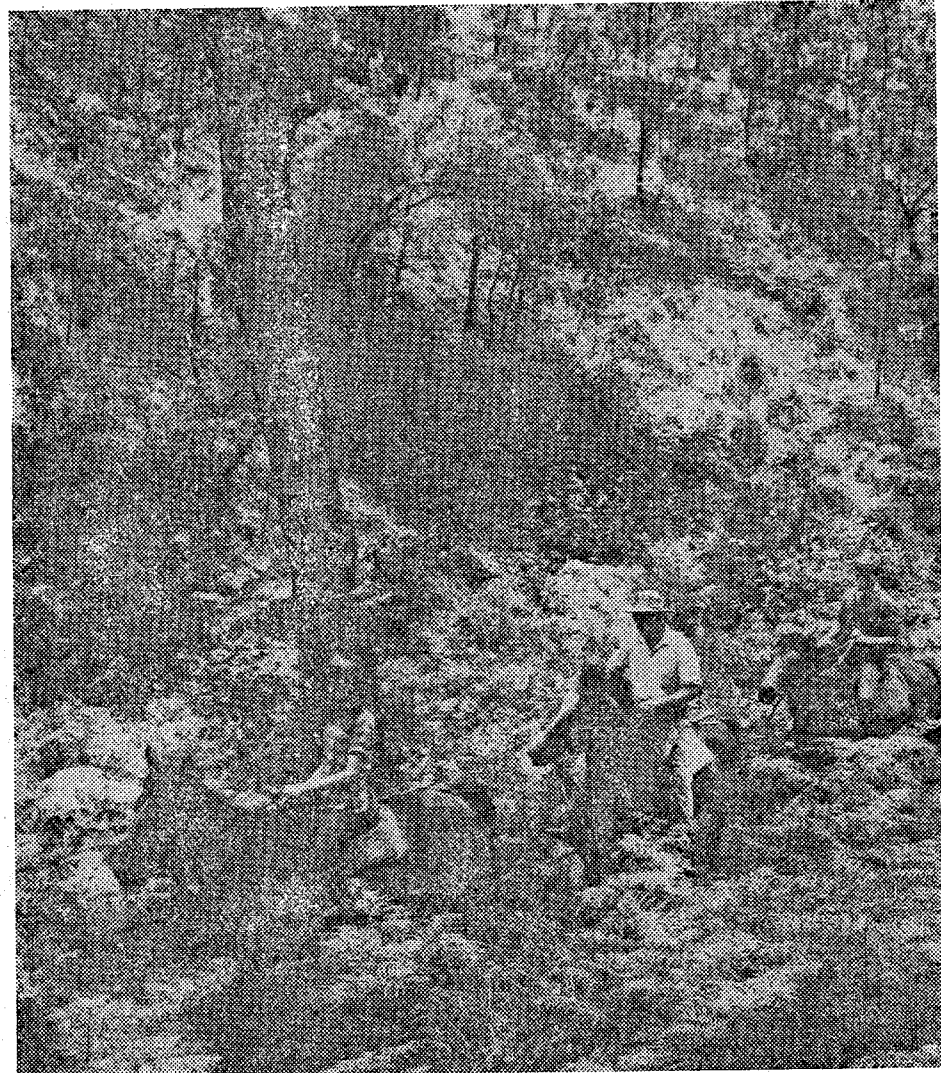
Alternative four starts to permit flat building and envisages a considerable decline in the area's appeal to tourists.

A HOST OF DECISIONS

By the time the strategic plan gets to its final alternative, with a population capacity of 275,000, it is seeing almost certain pollution of the Hawkesbury River basin, serious damage to the environment, inevitable ribbon development along the road system in the lower mountains and a 335 per cent increase in commuters to Sydney over Alternative One.

There would need to be \$100 million spent on water and sewerage works, 26 per cent of the population in medium density housing including flats, vastly increased spending on new schools, community centres and a regional hospital.

On the other hand there are some advantages to size, the plan points out: better services, better transport and more wealth in the community. Though it seems unlikely that many Blue Mountains people will be attracted by the



HORSE riders in the Blue Mountains may be the last of a breed if a proposed expansion occurs in the area.

picture of hugely-boasted urbanisation the plan paints in Alternative Five, many may see some benefit in the more modest provision of light local industry suggested in some of the lower options.

With the publication of the strategic plan, Blue Mountains people find themselves faced with a host of decisions to take. Some of them need to be taken very quickly, such as decisions on ways of holding up new sub-divisions which would take residential development beyond the boundaries the community may later want to set on urbanisation.

And at the end of it all there still lies the last dark question. Many planners outside the Government see little hope of regional decentralisation away from the coast really taking off in Australia.

But assuming that the Government's plans for regional centres do in fact come to fruition, how are the sleepy, rural, village-style Blue Mountains people going to cope with the problems of being the main road to Bathurst-Orange?

**GERALDINE
PASCALL**

Blood on yer boots

REMEMBER what they used to tell us? It's not if you win or lose, but how you play the game. Like "fair go" it was part of the creed.

Now it has the hollow ring of an obituary to some once-great god. Tell it to Chris Hesketh, captain of the British Rugby League team who played against NSW Western Division in Orange last week.

"It was without doubt the roughest and dirtiest game I've ever played in," he said after the match. "Some of the opposing players could only be described as hatchet men and we were the chopping blocks."

The crowd jeered, pelted the players and referee with beer cans and cheered as one British player had to leave the field with a dislocated shoulder. The referee was escorted off by a police guard.

Oh yes, Britain won, 25 to 10 — R.I.P. the great Australian sporting life.

It was by no means the first, or even the most violent, incident in contact sport in Australia. Football and Soccer have become vicious, dangerous games — on the field and in the stands.

Sport, says my concise OED; "amusement, diversion, fun . . . pastime, game, outdoor pastime."

Eight per cent of brain injuries are caused by sport, says the Australian Sports Medical Foundation.

"Players are crippled" is the sort of sport the headlines talk about now. It has been the same in almost every major match over the past few months.

In Perth there are incidents of spectator violence; in Brisbane a barrage of beer cans halts play in an All Blacks Rugby match (they won 42-6); in Victoria, at a VFL game at Essendon, there are more beer cans and a brawl at half-time involving players, spectators, officials and umpires (Richmond beat Essendon).

GLADIATORIAL

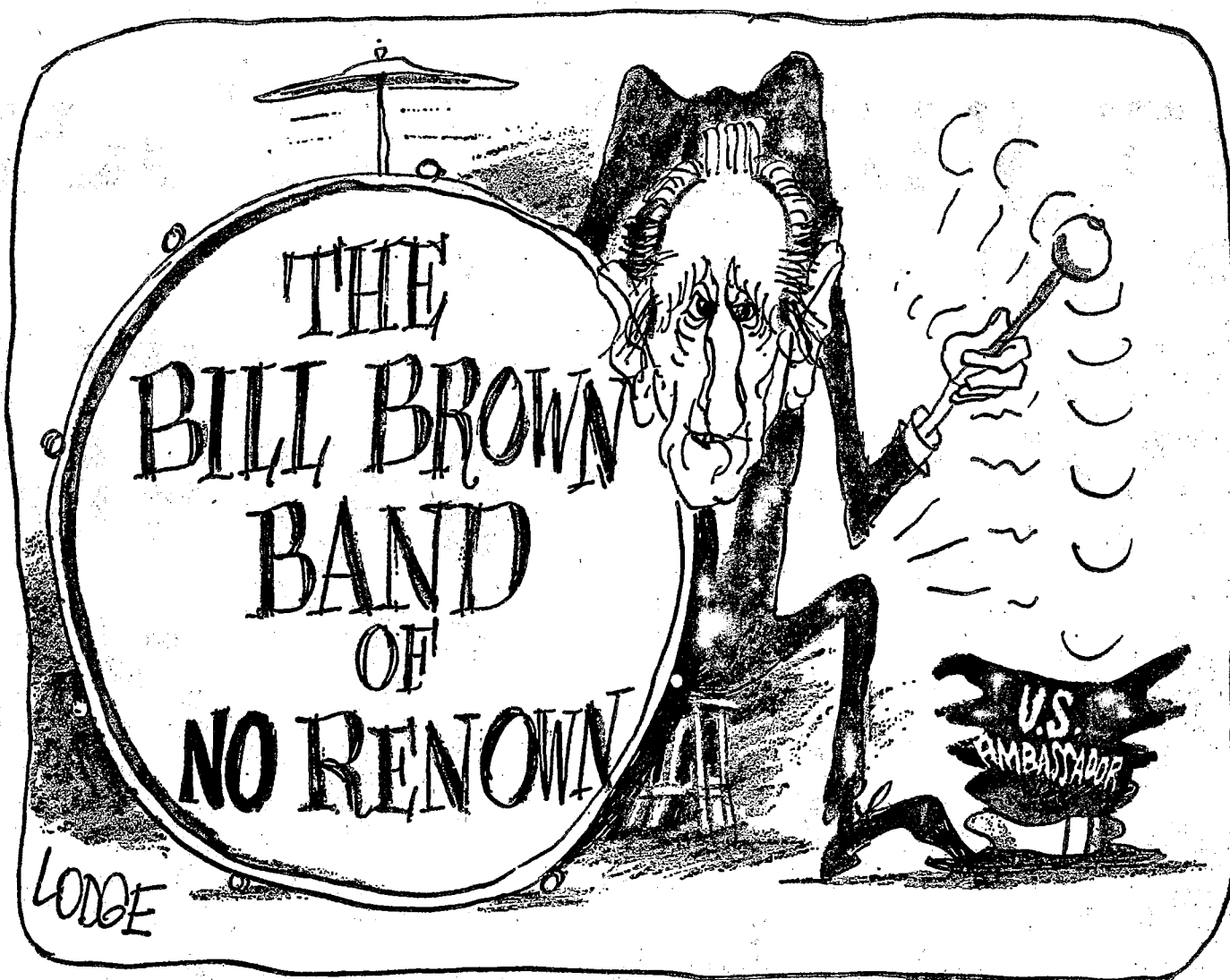
In NSW players punch and kick the referee. Rugby League players are instructed to play "hard and tough"; there are allegations of a planned attack on key opposition players during a league match and of karate blows in a Soccer match.

Before the Australian World Cup Soccer team played Uruguay in Melbourne in April a Sydney psychologist, Mr John Burgess, flew down to prepare the team mentally for the big game.

"It is very important that every player is equipped mentally to cope with the emotions and pressures that are brought to bear during the game," he said.

A suit of armor and chainmail would be more to the point. If it didn't save them from attacks on the field it might protect them from the beer cans and blows of the crowd.

Spectator sport has become spectacle, a sort of gladiatorial sport.



Letters

TO THE EDITOR

Please address all letters to G.P.O. Box 4162, Sydney, NSW 2001.

The state of our police

In another, he might welcome the idea that the same criteria should apply to him as to any other industry, especially in the matter of communication with the government.

There can be no doubt that the rural community were communicate in agricultural affairs as the urban community does in industrial matters, its voice would be able.

Suppose it were to follow the example of what some un-
known humorist has called
"industrial action" but which
really "industrial inaction"
refuse to take part in ag-
gure; that is, have what
man in the street calls
"her bloody-strike."

Whether it were for a 30-
week with treble time on
days for religious reasons
or other noble cause, the
it would cause would
even the postal workers
with envy. Come to
of it, they would be the
green things in that sea-

L. H. DALZIEL
Grange, SA.

P salaries

OUR front page feature
perhaps implies that all
anchors supported pay
for MPs. Three months

but copies are available from
the tribunal.

Dr Cairns is unique among
his fellows.

R. C. WRIGHT

Hobart, Tas

(The writer is Liberal
senator for Tasmania.)

'Sickened'

RECENTLY, I was sickened to
see the brainwashing children
are continually subjected to by
afternoon television viewing.
In one certain cartoon rerun
of third or fourth vintage the
two villains, named Boris and
Natasha, are repeatedly sent
on assignments of murder and
destruction by their leader,
who is, by the way a "mad
dictator."

This is one of many such
examples of the American
propaganda which is a poor
substitute for entertainment
anyway—which we unthink-
ingly allow our future citizens
to be subjected to. At my
school, and with a neighboring
primary school, I have a lot of
contact with the victims of
this pollution and I have seen
how many children take it
seriously.

Most of them are old enough
to know better, but they often
make stupid remarks about
the Russians which they
obviously learned from the
television. How can we allow
this underhanded prejudicing
of our young people particu-

precise data is the field of fe-
tology. We now know every
major development stage of
the human foetus after fertili-
sation, to within days.

We know when it can cry
when it feels pain. In spite of
all this most of our commu-
nity leaders are hesitant to up-
date the laws relating to
human life.

I believe our governments,
Federal and State, should give
the lead: the Federal Govern-
ment in its proposed bill of
rights and the State govern-
ments with their outdated
laws relating to abortion.

P. MCCARTHY
Penshurst, NSW

Sculptors

WITH REFERENCE to your
article Canberra Rights
(14/6) we congratulate *The
Australian* for presenting
such a fine selection of Can-
berra's sculpture, and we are
delighted with the general un-
derstanding that sculpture
makes such a valuable contri-
bution to the community en-
vironment.

Canberra indeed is setting
an example to the rest of
Australia in this regard.

However, we would like to
point out an oversight in not
naming any of the Australian
sculptors whose work was pic-
tured. These Australian ar-
tists, Tom Baass, Marget
Hinder and Norma Rodgett