 **Landcare Broken Hill Inc**

***Greening the Hill Mk2***

ABC Radio interview No.39 – 19 February 2020

**CITIZEN SCIENCE & THE CENTENARY OF THE BARRIER FIELD NATURALISTS’ CLUB**

**One of Landcare Broken Hill’s partners in Greening the Hill Mk2, is the Barrier Field Naturalists’ Club in Broken Hill. Both organisations share a love for our natural Far West environment and are determined to work together to protect it.**

The Barrier Field Naturalists’ Club, one of the oldest club in Broken Hill, indeed, one of the oldest regional Field Naturalists’ clubs in Australia, was founded on **18 February, 1920**.

**Origins of the concept**

The concept of a Field Naturalist Club was not new, it being part of a global phenomenon of ordinary citizens coming together to share their enthusiasm for and study of natural history, perhaps better described as the sciences of the environment. These sciences or studies include botany, geology, ornithology, zoology, biology etc. It has been described as a movement of people who share a common interest in the natural world.

The origins of the study of ‘natural history’ is ancient and can be sourced back into antiquity when natural history covered essentially any field of study connected with nature. Aristotle is attributed as being the first to write on the subject, however the greatest milestone in ancient times was when the Roman academic Pliny the Elder wrote his Encyclopedia of Natural History in 77 to 79AD. The field evolved to embrace all biological and geological sciences. The movement peaked with the formation of learned societies such as The Royal Society in London in 1660 with its full original name of The Royal Society for Improving Natural Knowledge. Some of the greatest scientific expeditions across the world were funded by clubs like the Royal Society, with people like Joseph Banks, the botanist on Cook’s expeditions and Charles Darwin, presenting their works to Society meetings. Royal Societies were established in many capitals of early British colonies, such as the Royal Society of Victoria, founded in 1854, which amongst other achievements funded the Burke & Wills Expedition.

Two of the oldest state-wide Field Naturalists’ clubs are The Field Naturalists Club of Victoria, founded in May 1880, and the Tasmanian Field Naturalists Club was formed in 1904. I couldn’t find reference to a state-wide FN club in NSW.

**Back to Broken Hill**

The club was formed by local enthusiasts and visionary pioneers, amongst whom were Albert and Margaret Morris and Dr W. MacGillivray, on 18 February, 1920.

This year the BFNC will be celebrating their 100 years of community service, which will see a year of centenary events, workshops and activities, the highlight of which will be a Centenary Exhibition at the GeoCentre which opens in June and will run for 10 weeks.

Some of our most important achievements of the BFNC include:

* Their support for creation of the Regeneration Areas around Broken Hill over a thirty year period (a world-first now heritage-listed and world-renowned);
* having Mutawintji gazetted as a reserve then declared a National Park;
* intervening to save the "dig-tree” at Innaminka commemorating Burke and Wills’ expedition;
* having Broken Hill’s Central Reserve renamed Sturt Park to honour Sturt’s exploration of this region,
* progressively funding and erecting cairns with plaques commemorating historical events and notable people throughout the region, many of which are to be found in Broken Hill.

Perhaps the most significant contribution was the recording over time, including the collection of plant cuttings which were pressed to become an historical botanical record of Broken Hill and its region, of all aspects of the natural history of the region. Other members were fine artists, like the well-known May Harding, who illustrated examples of natural history.

Another artist was Elizabeth Cochrane who in the 1960s painted hundreds of very fine water colours of the plants of the district, most accompanied by scientific botanical notes on their reverse providing a description, common and scientific names, locational observations, date and season. A selection from this extraordinary collection will be revealed to the public for the first time in the BFNC June Centenary Exhibition.

This artistic tradition of Field Naturalists Club members has continued to the current day, so the Centenary Exhibition will exhibit the works of contemporary artists such as Ann Evers, who creates sculptural works out of botanical material and Semitj Hopcraft, the BFNC’s current president, who is a fine indigenous artist.

The Centenary Exhibition will also contain material extracted from the Club’s archives extending over 100 years, fascinating original material including notes, artefacts and botanical pressings. Broken Hill Council is assisting the BFNC in this regard are the City is now the custodian of the Club’s archives.

**Last night’s opening event at the Broken Hill Technical College**

About 60 people attended the BFNC Centenary’s opening event last night

Relevance of the Tech College venue.

* First meeting held in Meeting Room 1 – now the College’s library - on 18th Feb 1920.
* For more that 50 years meetings continued to be held there. In the 50th Anniversary BFNC volume it records “*Here hung our portraits: and its equipment and library guarded*.”
* At the entrance to the College is a fountain engraved to the memory of the first BFNC Secretary Albert Morris “Nature’s friend”.
* On the Tech College’s Honour Boards in the foyer are many of BFNC founders and leading members who graduated from their studies there. I noted Albert Morris graduated in 1906 as a mineral assayer.

**Citizen Science**

Whilst this year is about celebrating the past 100 years of the BFN the Club remains every bit as relevant today and into the future. In our current drought more than ever it has highlighted how precious and vulnerable our local environment is. It needs to be cared for and monitored. This is where Citizen Science can be so important. We can’t just rely on Government agencies and tertiary institutions to cover ‘the field’ sufficiently.

The on-the-ground local observations and studies of Citizen Science are critical, for instance, for identifying and safeguarding biodiversity. (That is why there are so many smartphone apps now promoted to assist Citizen Science – like Frog Watch App, Bat App, Plant Apps, Bird watching Apps etc).

Jaymie Norris, the Area Manager of the NPWS West Darling Region, the keynote speaker last night, spoke of how the natural history of the district influenced his life and career. He highlighted the value of letting children explore and enjoy the bush – an opportunity that few children get these days. He stressed how fortunate we are in BH to have bush exploring opportunities on our doorstep. At a time when both children and adults are increasingly sedentary, the Club provides the opportunity to get out in fresh air, socialize, exercise and be inspired by natural history – **and concurrently contribute to scientific field observations as citizen scientists.**

**Most importantly the BFNC offers locals the chance to learn about nature and appreciate the rich biodiversity of the region and to contribute to projects that conserve our increasingly challenged environment.**

**Landcare Broken Hill stands with the BFNC and will support them in all their endeavours.**

**The next public meeting of Landcare Broken Hill will be on Thursday 27 February**

**At the CENTRE FOR COMMUNITY, 200 Beryl St, Broken Hill**

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