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ROADSIDES A COMMUNITY RESOURCE

*Contrast — weeds and dieback... the beauty of
undisturbed bush.*





Sherbrooke Road Kallista was reconstructed in harmony with the surroundings, following concern for the environment expressed by local residents.

ROADSIDES BELONG TO ALL OF US

Much of the beauty of Victoria's landscape is dependent on trees and plants along road reserves. Roadsides are accessible and visible to more people than other aspects of our natural environment.

The diverse character of the Australian bush is there to be enjoyed by all those who walk or drive along a road where the indigenous vegetation has been allowed to remain undisturbed. The larger trees might be interspersed with a variety of wattles flowering through winter and spring, pink and white heath, banksias, purple harden bergia or countless small flowering plants.

Perhaps this experience of roadside bush is the most frequent opportunity the majority of people have of enjoying nature. But..... the need for enlightened conservation of existing roadside vegetation is important for more reasons than just having areas that are pleasing.

THE BALANCE OF NATURE WHY SAVE THE SCRUB?

The so-called 'scrub' is often scorned because at many times of the year it appears drab and grey and there are no plants which have large or brilliantly coloured flowers. Yet every plant has a function in the ordered world of nature. Even the lowly grasses and herbs provide a wealth of food for small seed and insect-

eating birds such as wrens and finches whereas the tall stringybarked eucalypts provide nectar for honeyeaters, seed for parrots and insects are found under the bark.

A widespread plant of local poorly drained soils is *Gahnia* or sword grass. It is a good example of a plant commonly scorned.

However it is the host plant for caterpillars of beautiful and much admired Swordgrass Brown butterflies. Because of this inter-relationship of plants, insects, birds and animals, our roadside vegetation should be treasured as a precious heritage.

Maintaining the natural balance is important because a diverse, balanced environment is a legacy of the evolution of countless thousands of years.



Swordgrass brown butterfly

WILDFLOWERS

There are species of plants which are now uncommon or even rare due to development of adjacent land.

Development and agriculture often result in clearing right to the fence line. Among the groups of plants that disappear first are the interesting and beautiful native orchids and lilies.

BIRDS AND ANIMALS

The roadside vegetation provides bird and wildlife habitat and also provides movement corridors for small animals and birds from one patch of bush to another.



Banksia marginata
— provides food for honey-eaters and other birds.

ROADSIDES UNDER THREAT

Road reserves are coming under continuous pressure from public utilities such as the S.E.C. with their tree cutting programs, power-lines, gas mains, water mains, telephone lines, drains, firebreaks.....

ROADS

Road improvements often involves cut-and-fill, clearing and wide barren shoulders. Many people prefer travelling on scenic winding roads, even if it takes a little longer.



Patersonia occidentalis
— once common in low lying areas.

“TIDYING UP”

Where only mature trees are retained and the undergrowth is regularly slashed or “cleaned up”, allowing no natural regeneration, the trees will eventually die and there will be no young ones to take their place. This is already happening in many farm areas. Many valuable roadside areas are needlessly destroyed by machines. Much more damage is often caused by thoughtless manoeuvring than by the necessary work.



In spite of adjacent development, this roadside retains its natural character — Cambridge Road, Mooroolbark.

WEEDS

Where roadsides are infested with weeds it is generally as a result of soil disturbance — a breakdown in the natural balance of the vegetation. Not only the proclaimed weeds — blackberry, broom and boneseed are a problem, particularly in the Dandenongs, but also pines and pittosporums and other plants which have escaped from gardens are spreading rapidly, to the detriment of the indigenous plants. These are weeds because their vigorous growth overtakes and inhibits the native plants. Disturbance or transport of soil also results in the spread of diseases like root-rot fungus (*Phytophthora cinnamomi*) which cause severe losses of trees and understorey plants.

LITTER

Drive down any major road in Victoria and look at the verges — disfigured with rubbish — cans, plastic and glass bottles, and bits of paper. Legislation requiring deposits on all cans and bottles has been environmentally successful in South Australia.

FIRE

Roads are often considered firebreaks and the roadside vegetation is slashed regularly in the name of fire

prevention. In places there could be a need to reduce the build-up of dry fuel, but the greatest danger comes from weeds and introduced grasses.

Grazing, slashing, mowing, clearing and spraying are counter productive in that they favour these introduced species. Once these methods have been used and introduced grasses and weeds become established, the same methods must be used at an increasing rate.

Native grasses continue growing in summer after the introduced species have died off and become flammable. Healthy stands of native vegetation are self-managing. The trees, understorey and grasses are in balance and there is some evidence that they will withstand the invasion of more flammable types of plants and provide some resistance to fire.

WHAT CAN WE DO?

DO YOU USE THE ROAD RESERVE?

Roadsides can be pleasant places for walking and jogging where the existing natural environment is retained.

Roadsides are an education resource that is virtually untapped although some natural history groups use them for study. Observing the same area at different times of the year can provide a most varied and exciting visual experience as different flowering plants, birds and insects are seen. It is worth taking a pen and notebook or a camera to record observations.

If you take the time to be involved in learning more about what happens from day to day or week to week in the natural world of our roadsides you will cherish our natural heritage. Such areas can be enjoyed by local people and also by others who visit or pass through the region.



Distant view of the Dandenong Ranges through tall trees of Cambridge Road, Mooroolbark.

BE PRACTICAL!

Use stakes to indicate where self-sown trees and shrubs are growing.

Help eliminate weeds from roadsides.

Protect the roadside where you live — work with your neighbours — show visitors the areas you value.

A roadside in its natural state is a garden that cost nothing to establish and only sympathy and an occasional handweeding to maintain — no mowing or watering.

If your roadside has already been cleared or partly cleared, make sure that replanting consists of local native species.

Support others in your district through local environmental conservation groups.

Take rubbish home with you — even other people's too!

Find out what your Shire Council is doing on roadsides. Make your views known to your local Councillors.

Insist that authorities find out what plants already exist on roadsides before major works are undertaken.

Contact your council before the summer slashing program begins to ensure that the areas of native vegetation you value remain intact.

Learn more about native plants and animals by joining Field Naturalist Clubs, Native Plant Groups and going on excursions with them.

Candlebarks and Casuarinas beside Cambridge Road, Mooroolbark.

CONCLUSION

All of us have a responsibility to become involved in the preservation and conservation of our roadsides. Unless we do, nothing will stop our native roadside vegetation from disappearing, along with the birds, animals and insects that have it as their habitat.

The Australian heritage we give to our children will be that much less than we inherited.

BE VIGILANT, STOP THE DESTRUCTION OF OUR ROADSIDES.

Organisations to Contact,

- Roadsides Conservation Committee
P.O. Box 41, East Melbourne, 3002.
(Represents many government and non-government bodies concerned with roadsides.)
- Regional Planning Authorities such as
Upper Yarra Valley & Dandenong Ranges Authority
Old Melbourne Road, Chirnside Park, 3116
P.O. Box 104, Lilydale, 3140. Ph. 726 0555
- Shire Councils
Sherbrooke Shire Council has adopted a Revegetation Policy for roadsides. Copies are obtainable from the Planning Department.
- The Proper Officer in your Shire.
(Responsible for carrying out the provisions of the C.F.A. Act.)
- The Road Design Division, Road Construction Authority.
60 Denmark Street, Kew, 3101. Ph. 861 5321
- Australian Road Research Board.
500 Burwood Highway, Vermont South 3133. Ph. 233 1211
- Conservation Council of Victoria.
Environment Centre (Victoria), 285-7 Little Lonsdale Street, Melbourne, 3000. Ph. 663 1561
(For local groups concerned with the environment or for issues and problems affecting several areas)
- Australian Conservation Foundation.
872B, Glenferrie Road, Hawthorn, 3122. Ph. 819 2888
- Field Naturalists' Club of Victoria.
c/- National Herbarium, Birdwood Avenue, South Yarra, 3141.
- Bird Observers' Club.
183 Springvale Road, Nunawading, 3131. Ph. 877 5342.
- Victorian National Parks Association.
P.O. Box 785F, G.P.O. Melbourne, 3001. Ph. 663 3591

The following publications provide guidelines on major aspects of environmental management —

- Sites of Botanical Significance in the Upper Yarra Region.
by P. K. Gullan D. M. Parks. A. G. Morton and M. J. Bartley.
1979 (Ministry for Conservation, Forests and Lands)
- Sites of Zoological Significance in the Upper Yarra Region
by M. R. Fleming, I. D. Temby and R. L. Thomson. 1979
(Ministry for Conservation, Forests and Lands).

