



RGSQ Bulletin

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From the President

'Sustainability' is still a hot topic, as it was when our immediate past president wrote about the Sustainable Community Roundtable and the 13 indicators of a sustainable community in his last President's Page in the September issue of the *RGSQ Bulletin*. I would like to continue to discuss sustainability and perhaps explore members' views in our own forum, the *Bulletin*.

The 13 indicators of a sustainable community (*RGSQ Bulletin*, September 2010) developed by the Sustainable Community Roundtable originated in the city of Olympia, in Washington State in the USA. This city chose Earth Day 1991 as the time to introduce its residents to the concept of sustainability through a mass mailing of a newsletter and a day long community event. The Sustainable Community Roundtable was established later in the same year.

I was most fortunate to have visited the Puget Sound area within the past couple of months. While I didn't visit Olympia, I managed 4 days in and around the city of Seattle which is a very comfortable city in a superb

location on Puget Sound. This city has a thriving arts community, an excellent people's market, Pike Place Market, an entertainment and community precinct adjacent to the site of the World Fair held there in the 1960s, abundant natural resources in and around the Puget Sound area, a spectacular backdrop in Mt Rainier, excellent transport, sport, and recreational facilities, and a number of first class hi-tech employers in the area, the most notable being the Boeing aircraft factory. This package of 'indicators' rate highly when considering a community's sustainability.

I suppose in my own mind and through my own life experiences and the media, I have developed my own concept of what sustainability means. I asked myself the question – I ask you the question – we might ask the politicians – what does sustainability mean?

Sustainability is not solely related to the environment. The indicators mentioned in the previous *Bulletin* are used in cities around the world to prepare reports on local community sustainability. I suspect these same indicators are being used right here in South East Queensland by Brisbane City Council, and the State and Federal Governments. Recently mentioned in the news media was an act of Parliament to legislate to preserve our best croplands.

One only has to go as far as Acland, just west of Toowoomba on the Darling Downs, to realise what strip mining is doing there to some very valuable agricultural land. There was

also a very interesting article on oyster farming reported in the *Courier-Mail* of 11 September, and the obvious ill-health of our marine eco-systems within the Moreton Region. These are just two of a number of stand-out examples needing sound management practices and leadership from governmental institutions if we are to achieve sustainable outcomes for the future in South East Queensland.

I'm not a professional geographer, and I suspect my view of sustainability would be about the same level as many of our 'ordinary' members within the Society. Before working in my current occupation I spent 35 years working in the newspaper industry. My view of sustainability obviously developed from what I read in newspapers, geographical journals and so on, and not from a background of formal geographical education.

At home we have installed solar electric panels and solar hot water on our roof; we have an insulated ceiling; we have installed wooden

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blinds restricting light to further insulate our home during our hot summers, and we have a 3500 litre tank of fresh water. There have been some generous subsidies offered by our Local, State and Federal Governments and all these 'improvements' go towards helping to create a sustainable future. These improvements are only part of the environmental mix and certainly not the whole package when considering the concept of sustainability.

I suspect I'm not the only one travelling this path as there is a general movement within our community to make life more comfortable, more liveable. There is a plethora of organisations within our community pushing hard to redress some of the mistakes of the past, and ensure a truly sustainable future, e.g. RGSQ, the Wilderness Society, CSIRO, Save the Koala, National Parks, Community Catchment Restoration Projects, Local Government and so on. When approaching Brisbane on the northern side we are greeted with signage 'Brisbane, Australia's most liveable city'.

I would like to continue and debate within our Society, issues relating to sustainability, your concept and how it affects your life, and the evidence in Brisbane (South East Queensland) on how far we have actually travelled down the path to a sustainable future.

South East Queensland while having a totally different climate, is equally blessed with natural resources and has slightly less population than the Puget Sound area of Washington State in the United States. (The Puget Sound area has 4.4 million people, 118 cities and towns, 15 American Indian tribes, 2800 miles of inland marine waters, 2500 miles of shoreline, 2 mountain ranges, the Olympics and the Cascades, 19 river basins, 68 state parks, 16 regional parks, 211 different fish species, 100 sea bird species, 13 types of marine mammals).

This is an enormous topic, and one almost impossible to address in a mere page of a monthly internal publication.

Within RGSQ itself, we've been

eminently successful in promoting our treks with an inbuilt theme of 'Geography on the Ground', and as a community organisation we're certainly lobbying our educational institutions hard for improvements in geographical education, so perhaps we can do more and open a forum and expand that education process to the general population within Queensland and South East Queensland in particular.

I started my presidency of RGSQ with a plea for help in introducing new members to our Society. Perhaps the public interest in sustainability may be one of the keys to entice those new members to our Society meetings. I invite you our members to email and express your views and concept of sustainability.

Welcome home our intrepid trekkers from a very sodden 125th anniversary meeting with RGSSA in far Western Queensland. I look forward to a report from Brian McGrath in next month's *Bulletin*.

Leo Scanlan

Lecture – Antarctic Historic Monuments

At the November meeting, Syd Kirkby, will give a presentation on: *Antarctic Historical Monuments: Their Nature and Preservation*.

Syd is one of Australia's most eminent Antarctic explorers, and a born story-teller. Don't miss his lecture. They are always absorbing.

Uniquely, Antarctica has never had a resident population and hence has never had a cultural or social history yet it abounds in declared historical monuments. Practically all of them mark events related to the physical discovery and exploration of the "last continent", overlain by various national political agenda. They are further unique in that, since the Antarctic Treaty was adopted, they have been subject to acceptance by the Treaty signatories, giving them an international recognition and status not seen elsewhere.

This implies a particular incentive for their preservation, which is rendered uncommonly difficult by their location

and the physical harshness of their environment.

They range from the obvious markers and relics of noble endeavours through the poignantly simple and heartfelt tributes of comrades to comrades, to cynical individual and national promotion.

Syd Kirkby MBE, Polar Medal, was born and educated in Western Australia. He began his Antarctic involvement in the wintering Australian National Antarctic Research Expedition survey in 1955/57. This followed earlier work in Australia as astronomer/navigator on a joint Commonwealth/State Governments expedition through the Great Sandy Desert, in 1954.

Syd was to be actively engaged in the exploration and mapping of Antarctica until the early 80s; both in the field and as head of the Dept of National Development's Antarctic Mapping group. His personal endeavours extend from beyond the easternmost boundary to beyond the westernmost of Australian Antarctica, a compass of about one-third of the globe. His Antarctic working life embraced the period from sledge dogs to satellites.

Away from Antarctic endeavours Syd was initially, a principal participant in and then head of the Australia-wide National Mapping Program of the Dept of National Development, Resources and Energy. This work involved the development of a number of highly advanced technologies such as the "Aerodist" airborne survey system; the Laser Terrain Profiler, and its offspring the "Window of the Sea" Airborne Laser Depth Sounder; digital terrain modelling; automatic aerial photograph image correlation and production of Australia's and perhaps the world's first topographic map through computer based compilation and reproduction material production.

His Antarctic endeavours are recognised in the naming of Mt Kirkby in MacRobertson Land, Kirkby Head in western Enderby Land, Kirkby Shoal in Wilkes Land and Kirkby Glacier in Oates Land.

He was awarded the Polar Medal in 1957, made a Member of the Order

of the British Empire in 1965 and was awarded the Thomson Medal of the Royal Geographical Society of Queensland in 2001. In its canon of the 20th Century *The Australian* newspaper nominated him as one of the 10 "Adventurers" of the century, a charge he strenuously denies, and supports his denial with the fact that in just over half of the nominated "Adventurers" he knows or knew, there is not a single "Adventurers" bone to be shared among them.

New Members

We have much pleasure in welcoming the following new members: Robin King-Cullen; Mr and Mrs R.J. Ranford; Peter and Janice Stevens.

We hope your association with your new Society is long and mutually enjoyable. We look forward to getting to know you at Society functions.

Icons Trek Award

The Society's 2009 Queensland Icons Trek won the award for "Community Event of the Year" (Regional) at the ABC Local Radio Awards. ABC 612 was recognised for its collaboration with RGSQ, and for reaching out to connect with audiences on multiple levels and in multiple locations in a momentous point in Queensland's timeline. It was an amazing journey, covering 7000 km in 9 weeks around the state – from the south-east, to the far north and the far west. The Queensland Icons Trek was all about uncovering the untold stories of the state. You can see the results online <http://abc.net.au/brisbane/q150/default.htm>.

Artesian

No one on the Haddon Corner Trek knew the origin of "artesian". From the *Hutchinson Softback Encyclopaedia* (1991): Artois, a former province of northern France, was bounded by Flanders and Picardie, the capital Arras. Its Latin name, Artesium, lent its name to the artesian well first sunk at Lillers in 1126.

Audrey Johnston

Cooper Country Forum

One of the major highlights of the joint celebrations of the 125th anniversary of the founding of both RGSQ and RGSSA was the forum on the Cooper Country held in the new community hall in Windorah. Brian McGrath and Brian Mealey had put together an excellent panel of speakers with local experience and expertise. For me the highlights were the local speakers who have a close and passionate attachment to the Cooper Country.

The forum opened with talks by the Mayor of Barcoo Shire Cr Bruce Scott and the Shire CEO Michael Parker. Both showed a clear appreciation of the difficulties of their local government in retaining skilled staff in such a lightly populated and remote area with its 'boom and bust' economic cycle. To meet these challenges they had to provide staff support such as housing, and social support services such as TV and radio re-broadcast services, that are not required of urban councils. The Council also offers a \$25,000 bursary to attract local students to return to the area after graduation. They also offer apprenticeships as well as traineeships to encourage their staff to gain technical qualifications. Of their \$25 million budget only 6% comes from rates, the remainder comes from State and Commonwealth grants as well as disaster relief funding to repair and improve their roads following floods.

A passionate description of the region and the management of its land use was given by local grazier and member of the Cooper Creek Protection Group Dr Bob Morrish. In particular, Bob described the vulnerability of the Cooper catchment to inappropriate activities, especially the extraction of water for irrigation. He is a strong advocate for the use of Wild Rivers legislation to protect the Cooper from further attempts such as those in 1998 to gain approval to develop irrigated cotton in the region. He was followed by another long-term local grazier, Sandy Kid, whose succinct message was 'leave the whole system alone and the Channel Country will survive'.

Biologist Vanessa Bailey of DERM provided a terrific ecological

overview of the region and drew attention to the fact that the Copper is the most variable river system in the world in terms of water flows. This variability makes the region extremely susceptible to the impacts of weeds such as Prickly Acacia and pests such as cane toads, both of which are reported to be poised to spread into the Cooper catchment. She was followed by Rhondda Alexander who grew up on the Georgina and had been observing plants and their use by stock since she was a child. Her experience and careful observations, especially of plants that are toxic to stock, led her to be 'encouraged' by the Channel Country Landcare Group to produce a fantastically informative and illustrated book on the plants of the Channel Country.

Gordon Moss of DERM gave another scientific review of the region describing its seven bioregions and its few 'permanent' waterholes. He described how recent research had shown that the algae that grew around the edge of waterholes (the 'ring around the tub') was the most significant determinant on the ability of the region's ecosystems to rebound after drought as it provided the essential food source for the invertebrates that are the next level of the food chain. He also described the Wild Rivers legislation as a planning and development tool that recognises existing development and rights rather than the regressive legislation described by some protagonists in the media.

The 10 presentations each demonstrated the uniqueness of the region; its vulnerability to a cycle of boom and bust; its sensitivity to climatic variability and its incredible resilience to that variability; the iconic status that the region has thanks to its history; and the great passion for the region that the people who live and work there have. I am sure that all of the members of both RGSQ and RGSSA who were fortunate to be present now have a far better appreciation of this part of Queensland. Thanks to the two Brians for setting this forum up and identifying such good speakers.

Ken Granger

Eromanga SS Recognised

Thanks to the disruption of the 125th anniversary trek schedule by rain and flooded roads, some 50 RGSQ members were on hand to make the trip to Eromanga from Quilpie to be on hand to witness the presentation of a certificate of appreciation to children from Eromanga State School for their contribution to the Queensland by Degrees project. The RGSQ mob more than trebled the resident population of this tiny outback settlement. In early 2008 the six students of this school made the trip to the confluence point of 27°S 143°E with their teacher and teacher's aide (on whose property the point lies). This has made them

unique amongst all of the schools in Queensland – of the many hundreds of schools across the State, Eromanga has been the only one to have the entire student body stand at the confluence point.

In spite of the fact that the presentation was made on a Saturday during the school holidays five students from the school, together with parents and friends, were on hand to receive the certificate from RGSQ Vice President Ken Granger. In his presentation Ken drew attention to the unique nature of Queensland by Degrees in its totality (there is nothing like it anywhere in the world) which made the school's contribution even more fantastic.

Chantelle Stephensen, the teacher aide at the time, told us that it would not be possible to reach the point at the moment – it would be under water thanks to the recent rains. She said she would revisit the point and send in some photos of its lush landscape once it was again accessible.

Ken Granger

Reduced Office Hours

Kath Berg will be on holidays until 19 November. The office should be open every day but may open later and close earlier than usual. Please check it will be staffed before visiting.

RGSQ Bulletin

November 2010

Lecture, Tues 2 Nov, 7.30pm
Speaker: Mr Syd Kirkby
Subject: Antarctic Historical Monuments:
Their Nature and Preservation

Geog's Big Week Out, 5 - 10 Dec
For: prize-winning senior students
Where: Perth and Rottnest Island

Social, Tues 7 Dec, 7.30pm
What: Christmas Party

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