

Session 7: Case Studies in Grassland Conservation (III): 'Happy Valley' Combining the Preservation Of Cultural and Natural History

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Introduction

Happy Valley is a rural property located approximately 2km south of the township of Adaminaby. The grasslands site under discussion covers an area of approximately 90 acres on a west facing ridge and slope overlooking the homestead.

This area has an average precipitation rate of 450mm, is at an altitude of around 1,000m and the rocky shale ground provides a relatively harsh growing environment for plants.

Rediscovering a grassland

The site was first inspected in December 1996 by Rainer Rehwinkel who at that time was working with the NPWS Natural Heritage Unit. Rainer assessed this site as having a conservation rating of 1, based on the diversity and integrity of the site and the fact that he located so many significant species. In all, Rainer identified 43 herbaceous natives, including the threatened Monaro Golden Daisy (*Rutidosis leiolepis*), plus a total of 14 woody native species on the site.

This was quite exciting news for the Locker family. Both Kate and I have had a long time interest in the cultural and natural history of this region. Over the last thirty years or so we have been involved as curators of "local history museums" around NSW and Victoria. The area where Happy Valley is located has a history of Aboriginal occupation going back many thousands of years and a European cultural history that goes back to the 1820s. The Locker family has been in occupation since 1848 and this continuity of ownership has left us with good records of land use over this period. Our long-term objective has been to use Happy Valley as an educational natural history and cultural heritage interpretive site.

The identification of these significant native grasslands after a period of 150 years of sustained stocking and grazing was of more than academic interest. It provided the opportunity to assess the long-term impact of a variety of methods of land use on native grasslands over an extended period. An opportunity enhanced by the fact that surrounding land, now used as Travelling Stock Reserves, a cemetery, town reserves and sports grounds, air strip etc, were all part of the same Locker rural property until the resumption of land by the Snowy Mountain Authority in the mid 1950s for the new township of Adaminaby. All these various areas, in effect, provide us with benchmark study sites to evaluate ongoing differing methods of land management and the effect such management has on native pastures particularly over the last 50 years.

Working with David Eddy from WWF Australia, we have worked out a management plan for the Happy Valley site based on what is seen to have been the positive aspects of past management practices. For example it is proposed to fence the area, not to totally exclude stock, but to allow them to be excluded during the critical seed setting period in late spring. Prior to the 1950 period this happened under the management practice at that time, when all the stock were taken to the mountains in early spring for summer grazing. At that time this had been an ongoing management practice for the Locker family for over 100 years.

Concluding remarks

Many rural people are fearful that the identification of native grasslands of significance on their properties will involve them in further regulation and be to their financial disadvantage, which they can ill afford. This is rather sad as most rural people truly care for their land and the envi-

ronment and want to do the right thing in regard to the preservation of native pasture and endangered species.

Having access to private property sites such as Happy Valley is vitally necessary to assess whether or not particular native species are indeed rare and therefore endangered. Also it enables organisations like WWF Australia to show they have a practical approach to the situation and can assist the private landholder as far as they are able to overcome any negative economic impact that may be involved in preserving native pasture and in particular endangered species.

As they say, it is very hard to be Green when you are in the Red!