

Corop News

"The Call of the Brolga"

Issue No. 9 – August 2003

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Leisurely Lunch on Lake Cooper, April 25th 2003

The Story of Lake Cooper – Extracts from the address given by Clem Furphy.

Part of community revitalization is the generation of affection for common reference points in the local environment. We see this in a growing attachment to historical sites in our area, generally connected with our built environment and social history, but also an attachment to our natural environment and its dominant physical features. For our community the Colbinabbin Range and Mount Burrumboot (or what's left of it), and the Corop Lakes dominate our surroundings.

Lake Cooper has an essential quality. It is our genius loci, meaning it gives us our spirit of place. While historical events such as war and changes of government, and good times and bad, and families and people come and go, Lake Cooper has had a constancy through time.

The Corop Action Group has really adopted Lake Cooper as its icon, and is in the process of reclaiming the lake and its environs as the community's common ground and reference point. It has become the focus of the revitalization of our community.

It is likely that the combination of land clearing and improved drainage in the Cornella Creek catchment has resulted in greatly increased flows into the lake. The night on 60 year period between the current situation and the last dry lake was probably not the norm, and much more frequent dry periods would have occurred.

During the dry periods, the movement of dust was great, and the dust clouds we have seen last summer would have been commonplace. Frank Brown remembers a sheep sale at Phelan's on the east side of the lake where the sheep yards had so filled with silt from the lake bed that the fences were not high enough to contain the sheep, and the people at the sale had to surround the sheep to hold them! If you were on the downwind side you couldn't see much for dust.

Lake Cooper is old, yet not that old. It was formed when the winds blew hard and dry from the west, and the soil was blown like snow in the mountains, or sand on the beach. The clay lunette on the east side of the lake is the biggest in the district – a testimony to the natural energy that created this place. The lake is taking the opportunity after nearly 60 years, to reverse the erosion of the lunette caused by constant high water levels.

Historically, reports of Lake Cooper's flora have varied from the 1840 reports of herbaceous grassland to the freshwater reed lake of the 1900's to the mudflat, cane grass and sand-beach floras of today. These reports tend to confirm that Lake Cooper had a pre-colonial flora that was periodically flooded or wet underfoot, yet rarely experienced years of inundation in all but a small lake area. This flora

consisted of many species of herbs, rushes, and grasses, forming in the main, an open grassy woodland.

Slowly, as a result of grazing, bulbous annuals such as the native yam daisy and the chocolate lily disappeared, along with summer growing grasses (particularly kangaroo grass). Around the lake proper were redgum woodlands, and the lake was much smaller and less defined than today. The cane-grass swamps were almost certainly affected by Aboriginal fire and native animal grazing. This would have maintained a patchy complex of plants and vegetation structure suitable for breeding sites of grassland birds now extinct from the plain such as bustards, plain wanderers and curlews.

To people who do not know the lake, it may seem dead. Yet we know that before long it will again be home to migratory birds from as far away as Asia. They will share our appreciation of the lake as a place of rest and recreation. It doesn't seem very long ago that we drifted across the water at sunset and communed with the pelicans.

This is no deathbed. Even as it dried up, rare and threatened plants emerged on the margins, perhaps taking their first opportunity for years to show themselves. And as the lake refills, as it inevitably will, we will again enjoy the refreshing water on a hot day, or gaze at the reflection of the setting sun as birds glide in for the night. Perhaps we will have a greater affinity with the cycles of nature as a result of this experience.

Luncheon on the Lake

On Anzac Day, April 25th 2003, the Corop Community Action Group held a very successful luncheon on the dry lake bed of Lake Cooper with approximately 250 people in attendance. Past and present residents of all ages attended from both the Corop, Colbinabbin, Stanhope and Elmore areas, including, Reg Mara who had recently celebrated his 100th birthday.

A committee had been formed only three weeks earlier to begin planning the event, knowing that time was of the essence if the drought were to break in the autumn. However, the idea for a function on the lake had been forming for some months. We felt that it would be a novel, memorable and historic occasion to have something on the lake bed when it was the first time it had been dry in 60 years. We also wanted to create a social event to bring the farming communities around Corop together – trying to rebuild a shared sense of community and support each other through the hardships the drought has brought upon many families. The organizers were fortunate to attract funding from the Drought Social Recovery Fund administered by the Campaspe Shire, which was aimed at supporting these sort of events.

Friday, April 25th arrived. It was a beautiful, sunny, autumn day with a gentle breeze. The setting on the open expanse of the lake bed enhanced the vast, clear, blue skies overhead. The marquee went up with the help of 6 foot steel stakes, used to secure the marquee in the soft soil of the lake bed. Equipment was set up. Caterers arrived at the Ski Club where they made the final preparations to the food and from where the food was then transported to the marquee as required. Numerous helpers assisted on the day.

MC and local identity, Clem Furphy gave an address on the Story of Lake Cooper covering the historical, geological, environmental and social aspects of the lake, with the focus being on the occurrence of drought and the significance of this lake to the community both in the past and present.

During the luncheon, local musician, Vince Ryan, provided entertainment. Caterer, Janette Murray of Scrumptious Catering in Stanhope provided a delicious gourmet feast, served very efficiently by a team of local ladies.

Bottles of wine that had been donated by local wineries in the Corop area were raffled off as lucky door prizes. Another highlight of the day was the commemorative community photograph taken by Rochester photographer, Gary Vredenburg.

Following this, the crowd moved to the site of the time capsule burial. Items included: locally made and grown tomato sauce, a mobile phone, indigenous seeds, photos, letters, Corop newsletters to name a few. Local 90 year old resident, Bernie Kerlin was asked to place the first shovel of dirt over the time capsule once placed in the hole, with all the children enthusiastically assisting in filling it in. It is hoped that the children's involvement in the day will mean that one day in the future when Lake Cooper is again dry, perhaps fifty years from now, they will return to be part of retrieving the time capsule event.

Unfortunately the hire people had to take down the marquee at 4.30pm that day, although many people still lingered on, reluctant to leave. A large number of people continued the celebrations back at the Ski Club, where the CCAG reflected on the day.

The success of the day was measured not only the number and range of people who attended, but by seeing and hearing how pleased people were to see each other and to have the opportunity to socialise together once again. Many had not seen each other for a long time and hence were very excited at the prospect of renewing acquaintances. Others were pleased at the opportunity to meet people who had lived in the same community for years without meeting each other.

Word of the Luncheon on Lake Cooper spread far and wide and was well publicised in the media. Above all we hope that those who attended felt proud that they were part of an historic occasion and proud of the community to which they belong.

CCAG Update Highway Beautification

The Corop Community Action Group has been endeavoring to complete the northern side of the highway town beautification. Unfortunately, there have been various delays and difficulties in trying to finish this project.

A couple of working bees were held to further mulch the beds around the shrubs and replace the shrubs that were lost over summer. However, with the wet weather at last upon us, we have been unable to do the final mulch and leveling.

We are very grateful to the Campaspe Shire who will be taking over the maintenance of this area as of August.

Along the Track

With the drought breaking we will again be undertaking revegetation of sections of the walking track in the spring.

Other works are also to be completed with weather and time permitting, including signage, car park, picnic benches and the entrance to the track.

Grant for the Corop Cemetery.

With financial assistance from the Holdsworth Cemetery Endowment Fund members of the Corop Cemetery Trust and volunteers have been able to refurbish the Sheehan Family grave. We have attempted to replace the post and railing fencing and wooden headstones in the original style, based on the few remaining bits available. Members of the Sheehan Family buried here are Mary E. buried 24/2/1877 aged 31/2, Thomas buried 17/9/1884 aged 23, Hannorah buried 2/2/1890 aged 49, and Ellen aged 11.

At the same time a lower railing fence was placed around the Mannion Family grave and a single red gum head-board made recording the burials of Andrew 27/8/1870 aged 6, Ma 24/12/1876 aged 14, Ellen.H. 8/4/1882 aged 2 months, Cornelius 16/1/1890 aged 12, and Thomas 31/5/1902 aged 72.

The Trust would be interested in hearing from anyone who has any knowledge of these two families for our archives records.

We gratefully acknowledge the generosity of the Holdsworth Cemetery Endowment fund in assisting with this project.

The Trust has been successful in obtaining an annual maintenance grant from the Cemeteries & Crematoria Dept. Human services of \$3,900. As the post 1903 records of the Cemetery were destroyed in a fire, and the records held from 1870 - 1903 are not complete we have had difficulty in locating the exact site of some unmarked graves. The Trust has received requests for a Memorial Wall so families can acknowledge their ancestors and plan to use this grant towards the memorial wall and a seat both built of local rock. Should anyone wish to place a plaque on the planned wall please contact the Secretary, Denise Acocks on Ph. 54841070.

Lake Cooper Water Ski Club.

Once again Ron Grinter from Stanhope has submitted an article this time recalling his escapades behind a ski boat on Lake Cooper in the 1930-40's

As a student at Carag Carag State School in 1936 I became aware of the existence of Lake Cooper. This came about as our teacher Miss Una Russell had a friend who took we school kids to the lake for a swim occasionally, very occasionally. At the time the lake level was low and it could be walked across, that is if you were taller than me.

Towards the north end of the lake was a wooden construction with a diving board on it. Some twenty years later after learning to water ski and having built a ski boat (Mandy) powered by a 1937 V8 motor (such power wow) Lake Cooper was the place to be. Every chance to ski was taken even after milking at night during the long hot summer evenings. Skiers came to the lake from as far away as Mathoura and Bendigo. Approx 20 – 30 would ski there.

With all this enthusiasm some competition crept in. The Lake Cooper Water Ski Club was formed with yours truly (Ron Grinter) president and Ken Major secretary. As we had a surveyor, Mike Fehring, in the club a slalom course was set out. One ski was used to negotiate it. A group of the more daring built a ski jump, which we sped over on two skis with lots of bruises and painful spots being the result if all did not go to plan. During this time the Echuca Power Boat Club also used the lake to conduct races. L.C.W.S. members were often asked to show their skills on the water by forming pyramids riding weird monstrosities mounted on skis and even acting out a wedding on water with the celebrant skiing backwards to confront the happy couple. Ski jumping seemed to be the ultimate crowd pleaser, well we thought so. Large crowds attended these gatherings about three times during the summer. The L.C.W.S.C is not to be confused with the Victorian Water Ski Club presently using Lake Cooper as their headquarters.

Thankfully the lake never dried up while we skied there. I spent a substantial part of my life on this lake and regarded it as a second home with happy memories of it. To me it was almost unbelievable to be in the marquee on the dry lake bed on Anzac Day 2003, enjoying the company and good food, realizing the number of times I had skied over this spot and nearly every part of this wonderful lake.

New Years Day Sports

Charlie Stevens remembers the New Years Day Sports meeting at Lake Cooper in 1936 or 1937.

In previous years the annual sports had been held on land off the northern side of the Midland Highway opposite the Corop Store.

The lakeside location proved a very popular venue with the added attraction of swimming and diving events.

A new diving board had been built and installed several metres off shore to the north of the old boat ramp. Charlie recalls being at the lake with other local children when the diving platform was floated out into the lake on empty drums and set into position. Bathing sheds and toilets were erected on the foreshore by the local men and final preparations were made to the athletics area and adjoining picnic site.

As well as water sports the customary athletic events featured footraces, novelty races and bike races. There was something for all age groups. The Sheffield race of the day was won by Vic Speers.

Miss Lake Cooper.

Lake Cooper has been the scene of many and varied events but have you heard of the Miss Lake Cooper Event?

In 1953 a speedboat carnival was held at the Lake to raise funds for Angela Emmett (nee Browning – Stanhope) who was one of the entrants in a queen competition.

These carnivals were held for about eight years until the early 1960's. Large crowds would assemble on the west side of the lake in the area of the old boat ramp. Quite a large amount of money was raised, lovely afternoon teas were served and great crowds attended.

Duck Shooting on Lake Cooper.

Bob West from Colbinabbin supplied this article giving his memories of duck shooting on Lake Cooper. Thank you Bob for your time.

Up until the mid 1960's there was usually good shooting on the north end of lake, probably always the most popular spot but very heavy wading due to the depth of the mud. A lot of shooters would also shoot on the hill on the north east end. Birds would come in from the Racecourse Lake and Greens Lake, pretty well over the hay shed, and onto the lake. The east side of the lake was often good for an evening shoot and the south end near Willoughby Bridge was also popular as was the hill between the bridge and Aynor's Swamp. In those years there would always be a number of boats on the lake which would always help to keep the birds in flight.

The lake was a lot healthier and there was always an abundance of bird life on the water. It wasn't long after this period that the condition of the lake deteriorated due to the presence of the European Carp and the increase in salinity. The bird life slowly disappeared.

It was a great sight after the lake had practically dried up and all the carp died. When the water was released from the channel into the lake, the ducks and bird life returned in hundreds.

From the 1930's to the 1960's the late Cappy Speers of Corop and his shooting party regularly shot the north end and most time recorded excellent results.

One interesting story is told about how some shooters tried to get the ducks to move off the water. Around the 1940's a local Corop school teacher came up with the idea of hiring an aeroplane to fly up and down the lake to push the ducks out to the shooters on the edge. The local shooters thought this a good idea so they put in £10 each for the cost of the plane. It all seemed a good idea at the time but it turned out to be a total failure. When the aeroplane arrived, the birds that were on the wing, all flew straight down onto the water and stayed there.

“The Nest” – Lucas Family History.

This article was submitted by Gloria Pell (nee Lucas).

William Lucas (1862-1960) and Minnie Christina Lucas (1871-1955)

William Lucas was born at Colac on 6th of October 1862, one of ten children of Robert and Sophia (nee Jeffreyes) who had emigrated from Kent, United Kingdom in 1853. On arrival there were three children, seven more were born at Colac where the family had farming interests.

William was a tree-lover and it is recorded in his obituary that he and his father were associated with the botanist Ferdinand Von Mueller and the naturalist Lisufe when they collected and identified specimens in order to publish a book and concurrently named most of the Australian eucalypts. The information provided by the Lucas' at that

time was gained from the Beech Forest in the Otway Ranges. Later the family transferred to the Bairnsdale district living also at Ensay, Johnsonville and Swan Reach.

William married Minnie Christina Johnson on 29th December 1892 at Johnsonville. They had a family of twelve children, namely:

Theodore (1893-1987), Stanley (1894-1981), Reuben (1896-1974), Edith (1898-1936) who married Rowland Hansen, Harold (1899-1964), Ivy (1901-1912), Jessie (1902-1975) who married Gladstone Kelly, Ivo (1904-1947), Vernon (1906-1998), Wilfred (1908-1987), Violet (1909-1997) who married Fred Freeman, and Allan (1911-2001).

In 1906 the family settled on land in the Colbinabbin Estate on the western edge of Lake Cooper. On arrival there was no house and so the family lived in a tent on the western side of the property near the main road (Heathcote-Rochester Road).

The property named "The Nest" was situated on what is now Lucas Road with the home very close to the lake. The original residence had four bedrooms and later the house from Devines was moved to add an extra two bedrooms and larger kitchen.

The land was described as flat country box-timbered with red and black loam soil. The family engaged in cereal crop growing and dairying but in what year dairying commenced or ceased is not known. Red Poll cattle formed the dairy herd.

Descendants recall fondly the beautiful almond trees lining the driveway leading to the house. From "Live and Prosper" a history of Rochester and district published 1954:

"William Lucas who owns the homestead on the western side of the lake has a picturesque property surrounded by market garden and lush pastures; wildlife is plentiful."

Sport was a very important part of family life. Quoting again from his obituary:

"William, a keen cricketer, on one occasion as a member of the Corop team retired undefeated and held both the best bowling and batting averages. He was also a keen yachtsman. Minnie Lucas had a long association with the Corop Presbyterian Church and was involved with many district activities.

Theo, Wilfred and Allan stayed to farm at Corop. Theo who married Helen Mary (Ellie) Hicks had a large land holding and farmed throughout his long life except for a time of ill health in the latter stage. Their marriage on 26th October 1921 was the first in the Presbyterian Church at Corop.

Wilfred came back to 'The Nest' after World War Two service and remained farming and caring for his elderly parents with his wife Anna.

Allan and his wife Olive Frances (Dolly) McInnes farmed at Corop until about 1970 when with their son, Neal, they moved to NSW.

Minnie Christina Lucas died in 1955 aged 83 years and William died in 1960 in his ninety-eighth year – a total of fifty-four years at Corop. They had celebrated their Diamond Wedding Anniversary in 1952. 'The Nest' was sold several years after their deaths and Wilfred and Anna with their family moved to Coonabarabran, NSW.

Shenanigan's Wake

The next production of the Gobarup Players will be a theatre-restaurant called 'Shenanigan's Wake'.

Seamus Shenanigan has recently died, the most likely cause being liver failure. It was his wish that his mates from the boozier should send him on his way in a manner that befitted his life. This wake is a most suitable send-off. His 'boozier mates' are, of course, the audience.

Those who saw last year's production of 'Uncle Jack' can expect to see the same line-up of crazy talented people, more than happy to make complete idiots of themselves in the interests of keeping you entertained.

The show was well received by capacity audiences on Friday 8th August at Colbinabbin, and at Lockington on the 9th.

Performances will also be held at Elmore on the 15th and Rochester on the 23rd. For a hilarious night out, organize a table with some friends and give poor old Seamus Shenanigan a proper send-off.

Public Toilet in Corop

After many years of negotiation and trying various options, Corop has a public toilet.

Lyn and Alan, proprietors of the store, struck a deal with the Campaspe Shire, which resulted in the shire erecting a toilet on Lyn and Alan's land, using their existing sewerage system.

The facility is unisex and has disabled access. Lyn and Alan have agreed to be caretakers and have already undertaken some gardening to improve the environs of the long awaited convenience.

Melbourne Cup Day at Lake Cooper

It's on again! Melbourne Cup Day on Lake Cooper is on Tuesday 4th of November at the Ski Club. After a recess last year, the schools are again having Cup Day as a holiday, which allows us to have an excuse for a family celebration.

The previous event was well received and this one is planned to give patrons a time to remember. A variety of sweeps will be offered and other competitions for all ages will run throughout the day.

We anticipate the traditional chicken and champagne luncheon will be the fare. We do not have funding this year, so a nominal cover charge will apply.

Some locals really got into the spirit of the event by dressing appropriately for the occasion and all ladies are encouraged to contact their local milliner to arrange their hat fittings. Men please dress in keeping with the occasion.

Please keep the 4th of November free. More information will be given by way of a flyer nearer the event.

This newsletter was compiled by Carmel Pearson, Pat Kennedy, Bill Barkla, and Katrina Hall. Graphics by Katherine Weeks. Thanks to everyone who contributed articles and photos and to Rochester Secondary College for its support in reproducing this newsletter.