



## Being First

Why the Americans needed it, and why Royal National Park didn't stand in their way

Libby Robin  
Fenner School of Environment  
and Society. ANU

# Introduction

*The 1967 National Parks and Wildlife Act in New South Wales is largely based on North American experience and legislation. It is a problem for the future to decide how and where European experience is also relevant.*

Leonard Webb (1969: 47-48)

# A short history of international ideas about nature protection

- 1893 ornithologists' concern for migratory birds
- 1901 International Congress of Zoology – 'extinction'
- 1910, International Congress of Zoology – international nature protection organization...

# Short history cont'd

- 1923 Paris First International Congress on Nature Protection
- 1933 London Convention - defining international nature reserves and national parks
- 1948 IUCN established for 'The preservation ... of wild life and the natural environment ... by appropriate legislation such as the establishment of national parks, nature reserves [etc.], with special regard to ... species threatened with extinction'

# The National Parks Idea (US)

## Yellowstone's cultural heritage

- The American West and the Oregon Trail
- The End of the Frontier (1893)
- Wilderness and American Identity

# IUCN international list of NPs

1958

- National Parks and Reserves established in most countries... contribute to the inspiration and welfare of mankind, internationally recognized... as wise land use;
- National Parks and Reserves valuable for cultural, scientific, educational, economic and recreational purposes; areas for preservation of flora, fauna and geology
- Supported by UN bodies, notably UNESCO and FAO...

(IUCN (Athens) 1958: 181)

# HJ Coolidge (1904-1985)

- First Vice-President of IUCN (1948)
- First Commissioner of Survival Service (1948)
- First Commissioner of National Parks 1958-1966 (Provisional Committee, then Commission)
- Organiser of the First World Congress of National Parks, Seattle USA 1962
- Harvard Museum of Comparative Zoology / University of Cambridge (Zoology) – gorillas/Africa

# National Parks in the Age of Ecology

*United States Wilderness Act of 1964:* wilderness is land 'retaining its primeval character and influence, without permanent improvements or human habitation'.



Along 'with Coca Cola,  
Mickey Mouse,  
basketball and rock 'n'  
roll, Americans could add  
national parks to their list  
of contributions to world  
civilization'



*Coca-Cola*



Roderick Nash (1980)

# Yellowstone: Iconic but not first

Scarcely any other civilized country under the face of the sun has done less in the way of preserving the original fauna and flora than Australia. We are really behind the English-speaking and even the Japanese race. New South Wales and New Zealand are the only honourable exceptions in our group.

(Anon 1904: 84)

# Royal National Park

- Legislation New South Wales 31 March 1879
- *National Parks and Wildlife Act 1967*
- 'Hampstead Heath' or 'Hyde Park of the Bush'



# Culture of wilderness, frontiers and national parks

- Frontier never closed
- Bushwalking not big game hunting
  - 'wild places where one can rid oneself of the shackles of ordered existence and escape civilization'  
(Myles Dunphy)
- Wilderness later: Olegas Truchanas





# World Heritage Convention 1972

- 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary 2012
- 936 sites – 183 (20%) 'natural', 725 (78%) 'cultural', 28 (2%) 'mixed'
- Australia: 17/20 sites 'natural'



The battle for sustainability  
will be won or lost in cities...

