

## **I.P.P.S. and the Creation of a New Australian Botanic Gardens**

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In 1978 the Royal Australian Institute of Parks and Recreation proposed to the Australian Government a proposal to establish a series of regional botanical gardens in which inland regional flora would be exhibited. These gardens would enhance the botanical collections existing in our coastal rim of gardens, which are associated only with our state capital cities and densely populated areas. The proposal was accepted in principle and there are currently six gardens being planned for development. They are: Alice Springs, Port Augusta, Longreach, Mt. Isa, Kununurra, and Sunraysia.

The Sunraysia Oasis Botanical Gardens will be a garden of world significance. It will bring together the plants of the world as the region of Sunraysia has brought together the peoples of the world. European migration to our region, immediately after the second world war, was very large.

The gardens are an expression of our community's horticultural maturity. It is a way of paying homage to our pioneers. It will be a place of tranquil beauty, of education, and of scientific involvement, rather than of harsh commercial survival, which was the lot of our forefathers.

They are gardens built with people power. We have raised over \$200,000 by public patronage and subscription. This money is destined for capital works. During this current harsh depression we have received great support from the "Friends of the Gardens", the local service clubs and business houses alike. Labour has been given freely and materials supplied either free or at cost.

The only government assistance we have sought is grant monies for community employment schemes. We are now recognised as part of the local TAFE college campus for horticultural students and as an exhibition facility for our regional scientific institutions.

### **I.P.P.S. INVOLVEMENT**

It is true to say that the gardens would not have been created had it not been for the Australian Region of I.P.P.S.

During a lunch-time discussion, at CSIRO Research Station, Merbein, Victoria, some 40 years ago, three young men decided to build a botanic garden, as it was the one horticultural facility not provided for in the forward planning of our irrigation district, as designed by the Chaffey Bros of Canada, when Mildura was first developed. I was one of those young men.

I.P.P.S. member Lois Smith, an outstanding applied botanist in her own right, and I, in the company of I.P.P.S. members from all over, have visited most of the great gardens of the world. Our first exposure to world horticulture come under the leadership of Ed Bunker, our inaugural Australian chapter at large president. Typical of Edward's sensitivity, he planned a trip which in addition to witnessing plant propagation, also included the end product of great plantsmanship, the fully

mature plants exhibited in exciting and marvellous gardens. It was on an I.P.P.S. post conference tour, in 1982, as an International Board member, that the spark ignited for us. We visited the newly established Pacific Botanical Gardens in the Hawaiian Islands. We brought back to our CSIRO colleagues the Pacific Gardens method of finance through patronage. In 1983, a steering committee, consisting of required talents such as legal, engineering, horticultural, etc., was selected from successful people within our community.

The committee of management of Sunraysia Oasis Botanical Gardens has four horticulturists serving on it, of whom three are I.P.P.S. members. They are Lois Smith of Sunraysia Nurseries; Mary-Anne McMillian, a tutor in plant propagation at the Sunraysia College of TAFE; and myself, also of Sunraysia Nurseries. I believe that in the management of Australian Regional Botanic Gardens, this is unique. The committee employed John Wrigley, horticultural consultant and former curator of the Australian National Botanic Gardens, whom we knew through I.P.P.S., to prepare a development plan which we could put to our community to solicit support. Together with John Wrigley, I.P.P.S. member Keith McIntyre assisted us in selection of a site for our gardens. It has not just been I.P.P.S. members, but also contacts made through I.P.P.S. members which have proved invaluable in the formation of our gardens. We had, for instance, the renowned conservationist, Harry Butler, present the keynote address to our first gathering of patrons. This was organised through I.P.P.S. member Ray Aitken of Western Australia. The book "Grow What Where", produced by the Australian Plant Study Group, of which Past President Natalie Peate is a member, has been used extensively in landscape design.

### **LOCATION AND SITE**

The gardens are located 10 km from the heart of Mildura on the New South Wales side of the Murray River. Mildura is the centre of the Sunraysia District, which is in the heart of the great Murray/Darling River Basin. This river system springs to life in southern Queensland, northern NSW, south eastern NSW, and north eastern Victoria to empty into the southern ocean through south Australia.

The gardens site consists of 42 ha (105 acres) Murray River frontage and 110 ha (272 acres) of typical East - West Mallee sand ridge country. We are developing only 50 ha (122 acres) in our generation, leaving 103 ha (256 acres) for future generations to do with what they will. Lois and I were most impressed by the far sightedness of the forefathers of Vancouver, Canada, in setting aside 1000 acres for future generations to develop, within walking distance of the city centre.

The area we are working on will be developed as 26 ha (64 acres) of dryland gardens, exhibiting Australian flora and 23.5 ha (58 acres) of irrigated gardens exhibiting both exotic and Australian flora.

### **TO SEEK AND TO SHARE**

We share our experiences and methodologies with you. We will share the gardens' progress with you. We share the opportunity to be part of it with you. We seek your assistance in supplying plants true to type, for planting in the gardens.