

MYLES DUNPHY

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Myles Joseph Dunphy, doyen of wilderness in Australia, was born in Melbourne in 1891. Exploring wilderness and extolling its values was to become for Myles a way of life. He was arguably for Australia what John Muir that great American evangelist for national parks and wilderness was for North America. Although coming somewhat later than John Muir, Dunphy was a remarkable visionary. As an advocate for national parks Myles had no equal in this land.

The question has been asked how much was Dunphy influenced by the ideas and thinking of American wilderness philosophers. Although as a young man Dunphy's reading had included the American magazines *Outing* and *Outdoor Life* which were about adventure in the great outdoors, his ideas on conservation and wilderness were without doubt homegrown.

Myles Dunphy turned ten years of age in the year of Federation, 1901. Probably every youngster was enamoured by the event and there is every reason to suggest that young Myles was no exception. In Australia the economy was recovering from the depressed years of the 1890's. There was again full employment and working conditions had improved considerably. Australians had good cause for optimism. Part of the nation's pride was the belief in the athletic qualities of its people. Healthy outdoor living was taken as the way of life for most Australian citizens. A shorter working week had been achieved and a marked increase in public recreation had resulted. Perhaps the nation's chief preoccupation was with cricket, though excursions to the seaside or out into the bush were also popular.

Other factors were also at work in the community. Australians of the day had an emerging interest in their natural landscape. Henry Lawson's short stories, Banjo Paterson and other ballad writers were widely read. What Tom Roberts and other artists had achieved through their bush landscapes was also popular. Charles Darwin had been instrumental in awakening an interest in natural sciences.

Thus nature begins to take on a new importance and by the turn of the century it had become inextricably interwoven with the patriotism associated with nationhood. This was the era of emerging politics of equality, mateship and patriotism. It is what Judith Wright calls 'real Australianity'. Myles was influenced by it and indeed it seeps out through much of his writing and activities.

Myles began walking in the Blue Mountains in 1912, when on his annual vacation, he left Katoomba with his friend Bert Gallop to undertake the first of his long exploratory walks through largely uncharted country. The annual vacations of 1913 and 1914 were spent in a similar fashion. It was during these walks that ideas began to take shape. With his architectural student friend Roy Rudder and artist Bert Gallop, Dunphy began to refine the craft upon which bushwalking was based. They walked at first with swags and designed a lightweight tent which Dunphy had made up for thirty shillings and to which, significantly, he stitched the Australian flag. Then one evening in October 1914, the three of them together formed the Mountain Trails Club.

The Mountain Trails Club represented mateship on a practical level and was described by Myles as a kind of ‘bush brotherhood’, whilst the bush itself was the great equalizer and a profound source of nationalism. The bush becomes one of the ingredients essential for our cultural survival, for if we are going to continue to develop our own distinctive culture, then the landscape is a necessary adjunct. For Myles it was these distinctly Australian origins that led to the formation of his wilderness philosophy.

1914 marked the end of John Muir’s life. It is interesting to note that this was the same year that Myles formed the Mountain Trails Club. It was not perhaps a great organisational feat to form a hiking club with a couple of mates but it was to lead ultimately to the development of a bushwalking movement from which an organised and well disciplined voluntary conservation movement emerged.

Like Muir, Dunphy’s unflagging spirit and love of wilderness had hastened slowly in the field. Muir’s thousand mile tramp and the years spent in Yosemite Valley could be likened to Dunphy’s thousand kilometre walk from Nowra to Harrietteville in Victoria and then a long canoe trip in 1921 from Tuncurry through Wallis Lake and Myall Lakes to Port Stephens. Aside from these longer trips there were annual vacations from 1912 to 1934 to explore the blank spaces on his maps.

There were differences of course in the country Dunphy and Muir visited but their love of wilderness was their passion. In Dunphy’s prose:

A great carpet of loveliness stretched illimitably. Waves of verdure clothed the great ranges; great bastions of warm, colourful rock bounded the blue-green basins and valleys. Verdant lands fringed limpid streams flowing everywhere. Great peaks, noble in their grandeur, arose above all, the hubs about which the ridges and rivers were ordered. I was amazed with the wonder.

Myles was gregarious by nature and embodied that Australian sense of mateship on his walks. In contrast to Muir, who often sought out wilderness in long solitary journeys, Myles’ countless journeys into the bush were always made with mates and along the way he would stop and spend the time of day with farmers or old prospectors he came across.

Muir was a deeply spiritual man who had to combat a strict Calvinistic upbringing. He had a strong need to intellectualise and only by embracing transcendentalism could he resolve his doubts concerning an inner conflict of religion on one hand and a love of nature on the other. Dunphy did not experience as strict a religious upbringing and turned away from organised religion in his twenties, but like the transcendental Muir, Myles wrote: ‘For a knowledge of God, study Nature’.

John Muir devoted much of his energy in caring for the future of the Sierra around Yosemite Valley. In 1890 Yosemite National Park was created and was broadly what Muir had advocated. For Muir, his Yosemite park proposal gained almost instant recognition, for Muir was already an established writer and counted amongst his friends powerful people such as the poet Emerson and Theodore Roosevelt. America

had been settled by Europeans for three centuries; time in which much development had taken place, wars had taken their toll, and its people could identify much more closely with its scenery. Indeed, Muir's friend Emerson was but one of a long list of distinguished writers who had sung nature's praises in America, and Henry David Thoreau had found that 'In wildness is the preservation of the world'.

The Blue Mountains were for Myles Dunphy what the Sierra Nevada was for John Muir. Dunphy, however, did not count among his friends people in high places; his friends were 'the people of the little tents' and the Blue Mountains National Park proposal was to take a lifetime to achieve. The Greater Blue Mountains National Park scheme was formulated and originated by Myles in the period 1922 – 1932, but the first stage was not protected until 1959. The park was finally inscribed on the World Heritage List in 2000, as part of a much larger suite of parks stretching across the region.

If Myles Dunphy had to spend a lifetime awaiting his wilderness protection, Muir had to spend almost a decade in defence of his preserve. In 1906, the Hetch Hetchy controversy erupted when the city of San Francisco, in the wake of the great earthquake, sought an adequate water supply and successfully applied for the damming of the Tuolumne River in the spectacular Hetch Hetchy valley of Yosemite National Park. What followed might be compared to our own battles for Lake Pedder and the Franklin River. For Muir, the loss was to be a bitter disappointment, but he was at least able to write that, 'the conscience of the whole country had been aroused from sleep'.

For Myles Dunphy the destruction of wildlife in national parks, the logging of the Couridjah Corridor (now within Nattai National Park), the threat to Blue Gum Forest (Blue Mountains National Park) and mining at Colong (Kanangra-Boyd National Park) were not issues yet able to rouse the sympathy and concern of the whole nation. They were nevertheless battles that had to be fought.

In 1892 the Sierra Club was formed. John Muir became its first president, a post he held for 22 years until his death. The Sierra Club under his leadership became a tremendous force for the promotion and enjoyment of national parks and wilderness as well as for their protection. Similarly, Myles Dunphy was the co-founder of the State's senior bushwalking clubs: the Mountain Trails Club (1914) and the Sydney Bushwalkers (1927). He was also the creative force behind the National Parks and Primitive Areas Council (1932) and played an active role in the formation of the NSW Federation of Bushwalking Clubs. It was through these bodies that Myles set about the process of influencing a coterie of individuals who would support his ideals and carry his message to a wider audience.

The early national parks movement in both the United States and Australia was based on a variety of motivations. Yellowstone was concerned with the protection of specific landmarks in much the same way as, say, the reserve to protect Jenolan Caves. Sydney's National Park was as much to do with providing a 'pleasuring ground' for an harassed urban population as it was with protecting nature. However, what motivated both Muir and Dunphy in their national park proposals above all else was the preservation of wilderness. 'National Parks,' wrote Myles, 'should consist of a true wilderness and roadless core...'. Later he was to complain that, 'A hotch-potch,

all purposes national park is not the best type of national park. Its intrinsic values will certainly depreciate with time.'

John Muir and Myles Dunphy were both craftsmen. As already mentioned, Muir wrote extensively and was able to communicate his wilderness experience and leave something of himself for people of today. In the same way, Myles Dunphy has, through his maps and associated nomenclature, left a legacy of himself. Myles considered his work of mapping and naming places to be time consuming but it gave him much satisfaction. Who could not be drawn by his wonderful Tartarus Deep, Cloudmaker, and Rip, Rack, Roar and Rumble (all now protected in the Kanangra-Boyd Wilderness)?

In 1969 the Geographical Names Board decided on a review of the Blue Mountains region. They proposed to abolish the deeps, reduce the ranges to ridges and add the designation 'knoll' to Rip, Rack, Roar and Rumble. Myles, by this time in retirement, went on the counter-attack. He wrote literally hundreds of pages in defence of every one of his names on the map. He complained bitterly that the Board were threatening, 'to flatten his Wild Dog Mountains out of recognition.' Myles had his day and the Board decided to review its proposals. The names remained. The maps and associated nomenclature of Myles Dunphy project not only a guide to the wilderness, but invoke the spirit of the place, for what Myles sought above all else was John Muir's, 'I care to live only to entice people to look at Nature's loveliness'.