15 mile Creek Camp

the History
A man walked in the Regional Office of Education in Benalla one day in 1975 and said to Warren Garrett - District Inspector of Schools

“What can I do to help the youth of this area?”

Thus began a dream that grew as others realised the potential of closed schools at 15 Mile Creek, Eldorado and Oxley Flats.

The speaker, Bill Richardson of N.E. Joinery Benalla, was to play a major role in establishing a school camp on the chosen site - at 15 Mile Creek, near Greta South.

His dream to help youth was shared and enjoyed by many as the camp grew into what we have there today - a campsite that benefits not only the local youth, but children from many parts of Victoria.

I apologise for any inaccuracies or omissions that may have occurred in my research but many involved have moved from the district and memories change with time.

In compiling this history I received a lot of assistance. My thanks in particular go to Warren Garrett, Noel Thomas, Neville Melgaard and Kim Scanlon who contributed articles, Maxine Roach for typing and Graham Gales for production assistance via Regional Office in Benalla and of course the 1990 Camp Committee.

Any who read this are invited to come and see the camp as it is today - a dream that grew.

Helen Hurley
Broken Creek Primary School
via Benalla
INTRODUCTION

15 Mile Creek School Camp began as a local initiative to develop a community educational asset for the Wangaratta and Benalla District Schools in 1974.

Today, it has grown into a self-supporting, versatile and popular staffed camp that has played host to children of the first children who visited the camp in its early days. This development has been due to an enormous amount of dedication and energy from schools, teachers, parents, service clubs and local people, who shared the enthusiasm to develop a self perpetuating school camp - the only primary school camp in the bush in Victoria.

In 1974, when the decision was made to close 15 Mile Creek School, Mr. Lindsay expressed the wish of the school committee, that the land and buildings be used in some way to benefit the community. A new policy developed in 1973 by the Education Department, stated that closed schools could be allocated to others - thus paving the way to create a feature in local outdoor education.

The initiative was taken up by Dr. Warren Garrett, who was District Inspector of Schools in Benalla. With the assistance of Noel Thomas, Principal of Benalla West, a lot of things began to move! These included buildings, bridges, fittings and anything else that could be "acquired" for the project. A submission to establish a school camp at 15 Mile Creek was drawn up in 1974 by Pam Rooney and Barry Delavadova (P.E. teachers in Wangaratta). A committee was formed to support the concept of a school-shared camp - as well as to facilitate the initial establishment of buildings and grounds for accommodation and activities.

Schools were invited to become members of the camp on a $1.00 per head basis, and this began the commitment and involvement of schools from Benalla, Wangaratta and surrounding districts to their own local school camp.

Today, 15 Mile Creek Camp is almost fully booked by school groups throughout the year. It provides a weekend venue for clubs and private groups for family weekends, birthday celebrations or church group gatherings. Activities range from orienteering, abseiling, bike riding, canoeing, hiking, environmental experiences and snow tripping. For the first time since its establishment in 1977, full-time staffing (Kim Scanlon) has been provided to fully utilize the potential of the camp.

A list of names of people involved in either long service to the camp or through major contributions to development and direction is a long one.

Some of these people have left the district or are deceased. Mention can be made of a few whose contributions were major in building up and/or maintaining the vision of 15 Mile Creek.

* **Noel Thomas** - Principal of Benalla West Primary School, undertook the initial responsibility of co-ordination the organization and establishment of the camp site. Noel was aided and abetted by

* **Dr. Warren Garrett** - the "prime mover" in many ways - the concept, buildings, many fittings and many "door openings" were engineered by Warren's negotiating with the Education Department.

* **Bill Richardson**, from N.E. Joinery in Benalla, moved the buildings from
various sites to the camp, free of charge and donated his expertise and many man-hours to help this ambitious project materialize.

- **Roy Tobias** - a builder from Wangaratta; donated his time and skills to building in the initial site works.

(Two accommodation buildings have been named after these gentlemen in recognition of their contributions.)

- **Mike Lee** (Greta South Head Teacher) and his wife Marg, assisted with the initial establishment of the camp site and the recreational shed.

- **Barry Delavadova** and **Graeme Bruce** were P.E. consultants who gave input and practical assistance to camp programs.

- **Neville Melgaard** was the longest serving President from 1978 - 1987. His carpentry skills are still evident in many camp facilities - benches, steps, screens, doors and many repair jobs. Although now retired, Neville’s support and love of the camp remain as keen as ever.

- **Benalla** and **Wangaratta Lions Clubs**, and **Benalla Apex Club** with their many members, contributed hours of work to establish the camp site, and later develop it.

- **Bob Watt** (ex Benalla 31) and

- **Kaye Draper** (ex Moyhu Primary School) acted as Secretary and Treasurer for many years.

- **Alan Monger**, a parent supporter, gave many hours to survey the land and assist the purchase of 20 acres to preserve the bush setting around the camp in 1983.

- **Geoff Lacey** (ex P.E. later General Curriculum consultant, later still part-time Camp Director) brought energy, enthusiasm and excellent public relations skills along with consistent and practical efforts to re-vitalize and re-direct the camp’s developments from 1984 to the present day.

- **Kim Scanlon** - first full-time director 1990

Only names of those who regularly attended meetings remain on record. Many, many others have been involved and their efforts are evident today in the popularity and range of facilities offered that the camp enjoys. To these people, the district and the district’s children owe a great deal.
THE EARLY YEARS 1974 - 1977

Setting up the Camp at 15 Mile Creek

15 Mile Creek School was closed in 1974. A wish was expressed that the community should benefit from the usage of the grounds and buildings. In 1975, District Inspector Warren Garrett proposed the site be used for outdoor activities at a Principal's meeting.

Camping was receiving emphasis at the time and Noel Thomas offered to coordinate the project. A group of people - Bart Dinsmore (Principal of Wangaratta West), Bob Morrison (District Reliever), Warren Garrett and Noel inspected the area.

"Great place; great idea; too much to do..." was the verdict.

Later that year, the unstaffed school at Bungeet West was mentioned as a possible resource/facility that could be available to the Inspectorate. Neville Melgaard and Noel Thomas accepted the offer of Bill Richardson to shift the building free of charge. Arrangements were made to acquire the building from the Education Department and Bungeet West School was "lifted" from the site.

Noel Thomas' memories of that shift are still vivid. He recalls the following events....

"Richo said he'd gladly do the shift, at no cost to us, provided we got someone to act as his labourers. Noel said he'd be part of it; Dinsmore allowed his P.E. person (Keith Burden); Bill Richardson's own guy - Johnny someone; my two boys Brian and Steve "offered" to help.

Then it started to rain - Bungeet apparently had more rain in that year and there was no way Richardson was prepared to do a "love" job if he was going to be bogged. When the rain went away, the small group got into shifting the Bungeet West school. It took two days to load the building - Richo spent much time chaining the building to his trailer - much to my amusement. Comments like "bloody ridiculous" were the most Christian. On the way back from Bungeet
Once again the Bill Richo ritual was set in motion and once again his services were free.

It was on this exercise that the bridge had to come down out near the camp. The two trucks with the ablutions block and mess hall were grossly overloaded, grossly wide but were never in danger of falling off.

Richo said something at the time that they were better constructed than Bungeet and so travelled well. The slides show the buildings at Mokoan; on the road and with one of Joe McGill's buses having a "burn" to get past.

This was on a Friday and we got out as far as the bridge - without any hope of getting across the bridge. Benalla Rotary Club had offered to assist in a particular project but not in the whole deal and so they were given the job to have the bridge down by 6.00 am and to then reassemble it. The bridge is built with the four corner posts huge and solid. All the side parts had to come down. To the credit of the Rotarians at 6 am their part was done - the convoy moved over and by 7.30 am the Rotary guys were all home in bed.

(Brian Kerlin, P.E. of Wangaratta West, recalls the same morning's antics. He attended with Keith Burden, P.E. teacher. Geoff Lacey was on his way fishing and got "roped in". While waiting for the building ton arrive, he caught a fish.)

When the building went over the bridge there was a 2" clearance on each side. I have always said that Richo drove over at 30 mph in case the load was too wide to get through. There's a photo of Jeffrey Dunstan (Regional Director) dismantling the bridge which would be great "this is your life" material for either 15 Mile Creek or Jeff Dunstan.

Anyway the Benalla Lions were again at the site to block up the
into Benalla, all went well until we were back on to the main
Benalla/Yarrawonga Road, when a cross-wind and a bump
caused the whole thing to tip and we had this sort of view from
the rear.

Ritchie's comment to me was - through gritted teeth, "Thought
we'd lost it - know why we use chains now?" Diplomatically I
said absolutely nothing. I also add that I reckoned we'd lost the
whole damn thing anyway. I had the matches out and was ready to
burn the heap, when it finally collapsed.

Obviously it didn't! Jacks under the low side and three Hail
Mary's and back onto the road went the wheels and off we went
again. No further trouble until we crossed the railway line at
Witt Street (up near N.E. Joinery Yard), when we had to have a
Railway Supervisor to let us across the main line AND Police
supervision. Doug Elliott was in charge of the Benalla Police
Station AND a member of the Lions Club, so there was no diffi-
culty and no cost for this service. As the load crossed the line, it
wobbled and each wheel on the trailer lifted off the ground in
turn.

The following morning 6.00 am, saw our procession head off out
to 15 Mile Creek, with a police escort because we were 8' wider
than legal and really did take up the whole of the road.

At the site, the Lions Club of Benalla guys had the blocks cut, holes
prepared for the building and it was on its blocks and ready to go
by about 4.00 pm.

All the usual hassles - do you realize there are only four SEC
wires across the road from Benalla to 15 Mile Creek? Do you
realize how steep the hills campsite? Longest drive I'd done -
and I was only driving a ute at the end of the procession - sort of
like a guard's van. At that time there was still NO official com-
mittee and Garrett was absent. His replacement - Barry Borley
- gave us the OK to do what had to be done. A meeting was called.
It was surprisingly well attended and we had representatives
from most of the big schools. Barry Delavadova was involved,
but was not going to be around for long.

This group decided:
a) that it was interested in developing the site,
b) to test the schools sincerity by asking for capital (when it
was needed) at the rate of $1.00 per head of population,
c) that we'd meet again in a month.

No elections/executive etc., were held/appointed at this stage - I sat
out the front as "convenor" I guess. At the next meeting, there was
general approval to proceed - I think it was at this stage that I was
appointed Chairperson: Bob Watt - Secretary: Kaye Draper -
Treasurer.

Then we got wind of the State Rivers Camp at Mokoan closure and
the wish to dispose of the ablutions block and the dining hall.
Tenders were called for the "sale for removal" of these items. The
facilities were ideal for our purposes, and the committee decided to
put in a bid. We reckoned $1,200 was our limit for both buildings
and of course, our tender was successful, but was conditional on
our getting the site cleared within a month.
building when they arrived. Names like Ken Grant, Len Levy, Jack Hale, Albert Muldeary, Ross Smith and Stan Gillis all spring to mind as enthusiastic volunteers who worked their butts off for the project.

The ablutions block was first in and it went in quickly and easily; the mess hut was bogged down near the front fence - the gateway could not be used so a “road” had to be cut to get the trucks in through the adjacent blocks. Fences were dealt with arbitrarily.

The decision to leave the 12 feet between the hall and the existing shelter shed was made by Lion Stan Gillis (PWD Inspector) as the building was backing in. Such decision making was indicative of the planning that went on. The 12 feet of course, should have been 20, but when we decided, the truck was already at the 15 foot mark and moving back.

Benalla Lions did all the blocking and levelling of the two buildings, cost to us - nil!

We now had Bungeet West, ablutions block, mess hut in their present positions and not connected to anything - no gas bottles - uncertain (to say the least) water supply - some lining needing to be completed, not enough toilets to be legal - but some great facilities. No one responsible (i.e. no real committee) and about $2,000 of our original collection left.

We approached Roy Tobias - a contractor in Wangaratta, who did heaps of work for PWD (Stan Gillis again) and told him what we wanted him, as a builder, to do with the kitchen area. He built in the 12’ gap, put in the stove which he had just condemned from a police station residence and I think he provided the slow combustion stove from his parent’s home.

Anyway, he did that building, the shelving in the servery area and the replacing of wash up tubs in the kitchen, lining the kitchen and wash up area and provided the slate table (food preparation) that had been the target wall in the boys urinal from some school or other. People at first did not understand the comments about salty food, but when they did, were promptly ill. Roy’s comments were, “The slate is a great cutting surface and sooner or later no-one will know about urinals that aren’t stainless steel.” He did all this for $1,000, of course losing massive amounts of money. The building was named in his honour, an act that he appreciated to the tune of a $500 donation. A great guy who really put in but expected little.

The plumbing was done also on a “How much can you do for $1,200?” The contractor was Arnold Norton from Wangaratta and he connected all the pipes, did all the drainage works, fixed the dummies, put in a new additional septic, sent us a bill for $2,200 and accepted $1,200.

The gas bottles came from Lima East, Lima and other places. They were removed from these schools by Garrett and I, probably illegally. At Carboor, we were loading up the trailer when the local farmer came round the corner with a gun to see what we were doing. I left the talking to Garrett ‘cos I had pictures of Noel in a coffin. Anyway the guy recognized Warren Garrett and finished up
helping us to load up. Lining for the "teachers' room" in the ablutions block is the blackboard from the Lime East School entered by Garrett/Thomas one Sunday afternoon. We didn't have a key but the window was open so.....!

A working bee was held just prior to opening the first camp at which Wangaratta Lions, Benalla Lions and teachers were invited to generally clean up the place, as it now existed. Scrubbing brushes and window cleaning and assembling beds was the order of the day. The bunks were purchased on credit from a place in Wangaratta.

Benalla West had the first two camps as an administrative Hitler-type act which one allowed us to find out what wasn't going to shake-down. The original cutlery came from my mother's house, She died the weekend prior to the very first camp and I was replaced by Bob Morrison. The cooking utensils were purchased from McEwans in Melbourne from this catering supplies and West paid for it instead of paying for the first camp. I did this purchasing.

As soon as the camp got under way, the committee was elected. Kaye Draper was a key person early on. She certainly had the only job prescription that existed in my time and she accepted bookings, sent bills and all that stuff. Bob Watt was there somewhere and the Phys. Ed. guy, Graeme Bruce. At this time I bowed out.

At the official opening, the Ministry stated publicly that "this was one of the best community based programs that he had seen" - although his comments were politically based and "right" to say the project in my time certainly was that. I had help from:

- Bill Richardson whose contribution was major
- Benalla Lions Club
- Benalla Rotary
- Wangaratta Lions Club
- Benalla Police
- Benalla S.E.C.
- Roy Tobias
- Arnold Norton, Plumber, Wangaratta
- Lloyd Berry, Electrician, Benalla
- Peter Ross-Edwards
- David Evans
- Wangaratta Shire
- Shire of Oxley
- State Rivers & Water Supply Commission.

This list of course, relates to all the pre-occupation of camp and is all in the time 1974 - till the camp opening in 1977. My memories of the place are so positive:-

- The "why can't we" attitude of all concerned.
- The manipulation of resources.
- Garrett's vision for the site.
- The co-operation of the locals."

Noel's memories convey the spirit of co-operation and the willingness of the community to put their energies into this project. Closed schools were indeed utilized to the advantage of others. Apex clubs gave $500 for equip-
ment. Many working bees finally reached the end of the project and 15 Mile Creek Camp was ready for occupancy in February, 1977.

Another person who was actively involved at this time - and for years to come - was Neville Melgaard. His recollections of this period of camp beginnings include

"My earliest involvement with the 15 Mile Creek Camp was when in company with three or four others I went out to Bungeet West School site with Mr Bill Richardson. Bungeet West was a closed school, a single roomed isolated building with a porch and a very high pitched roof. This constituted a big problem with the removal of this building and re-erection as 15 Mile Creek Camp. The sheets of iron from the highest part of the roof were removed, and the rafters were cut and refixed to lower the roof line, and the iron replaced. Then came the task of carefully jacking up the building, knocking out rows of stumps, manoeuvring the jinker in position and then gradually lowering the building on to it. Even with the reduced roof height, electricity wires crossing the road had to be pushed up to allow progress to 15 Mile Creek.

We also attempted to remove the freshwater tank to take to the camp but unfortunately in the process of coming down from the stand, it got away and suffered a rather embarrassing crushed bottom edge and consequently was never used. The tank stand itself was removed and was later used at the camp. The Benalla Lions Club put in the stumps at 15 Mile Creek for the Bungeet West building which is now used as the boys dormitory.

Also about this time groups of volunteers were engaged in pulling down shelter sheds and toilet blocks with the view of rebuilding them at 15 Mile Creek. Thank goodness this plan was later abandoned. We were very fortunate that at this time the then State Rivers and Water Supply Commission had completed the building of the wall etc at Lake Mokoan and had entered into an agreement with the Benalla Water and Sewerage Authority (now Benalla Water Board) to construct a further dam on the Upper Ryan's Creek (the McCall-Say Reservoir) to ensure an adequate water supply for Benalla. Whilst this was happening, work had commenced on the Dartmouth Dam scheme and on completion of the McCall-Say dam the houses, etc at the construction village out on Kilfeera Road were to be shifted to Dartmouth. Peter Gill, the works superintendent and I were members of Benalla Apex Club at the time and it was through him that I found out that the kitchen, mess hall and ablution block would not be required at Dartmouth and would be disposed of. I passed this message on and it was through the efforts of our local member Mr Tom Trewin that the mess hall and ablution block was handed over to the camp. Quite frankly I believe that without these two buildings the camp project would never had got off the ground.

Again the Benalla Lions Club members came to the fore, putting in the stumps and of course Mr Bill Richardson carted both buildings out to the site.

The mess hall was lined up with the existing shelter shed at the school site leaving a space between the two. Mr Tobias, a builder who specialised in school construction and maintenance tied the two buildings together to make the kitchen. The shelter shed is the present wash up room.
Consequent working bees lined and painted the kitchen and through the generosity of Apex Joinery in Benalla, I was able to get enough laminex to cover the bench tops in the kitchen. This was put on during one of the very early camps that we held whilst I was at Wangaratta Primary School.

On a visit to a destaffed school Boralma to remove teaching aids, library books etc to bring back to Wangaratta Primary School, I notice there was a little electric pump at the dam. We had installed one of the concrete tanks from off the recreation shed at the time and this and somehow this little unit found its way out to the camp to pump water to the high tank. A subsequent visit back to the school (Boralma) was needed, however, to secure the shed to protect the pump.

I am very proud of the fact that I was able to secure the practice flat Bristol building when it was declared surplus to the needs of the Benalla High School.

Mr Bob Watt and I spent many hours out at the camp, building but mostly repairing damage to buildings, plumbing getting the pump to work, unblocking the septic system etc etc. but we felt that it was such a worthwhile project that the time was worth it and I think the development and usage made of the camp has proved this.”

Neville Melgaard.

In Warren Garrett’s words,

“We hoped to develop the camp through local initiative, that would produce ownership and therefore survival on its own resources.”

1990 has shown that these words have come true.
15 MILE CREEK CAMP BEGINS 1977

Growth and Development

The first school camp was held at 15 Mile Creek in February 1977. In recognition of the role played by Noel Thomas in bringing about the concept of a locally owned and locally run school camp, his school, (Benalla West) was granted the first two weeks bookings. The official opening of the camp was held on 28th April with Dr. Laurie Shears officiating. A plaque in the dining room commemorates this occasion.

Quotes from article in Benalla Ensign 27/4/77

SHEARS OPENS SCHOOL CAMP.

The 15 Mile Creek School Camp was officially opened on Friday by the Director of Education Dr. L. W. Shears. Many parents and teachers were at the opening with a busload of school children. Other guests included Oxley Shire President, Cr. W. Pleming, and Regional Director of Education, Mr. Jeff Dunstan. Mr. Michael Lee, a president of the camp committee thanked the service clubs, particularly the Benalla and Wangaratta Lions Clubs for providing funds and labour for the rebuilding of the school. He also thanked the local businessmen for their support. Dr. Shears brought with him the thanks of the Education Department and the Minister for Education, Mr. Lindsay Thompson for the splendid work done. Dr. Shears said that the 15 Mile Creek School was originally burnt down and that the people present had worked very hard to get the school going again. He was overwhelmed by the number of people who had attended the opening. "I have no doubt that the children will benefit from the camp."

Some Highlights of Camp Development

1977 Although established with basic buildings, much remained to be done to make the camp functional. Enthusiastic school support through bookings, family day working bees and many items of equipment, such as cupboards, fire extinguishers, tools, shower curtains etc., were "acquired" from closed schools or donated by member schools. New schools were still obtaining membership and the camp began to grow in popularity and usage. Lining of the kitchen benches and the scullery room were priorities, along with steps to the ablation blocks and dormitories. Neville Melgaard's skills were utilized here. Water was pumped from the creek and local Lindsay family often assisted "townies" to prime the pump or with small difficulties that arose.

At this time, Mike Lee was the President, Bob Morrison Secretary and Kaye Draper Treasurer, along with Bob Watt and Neville Melgaard. The initial teething problems of establishing the camp and steering its direction, were a large task for this group who gave their time unstintingly towards this. Graeme Bruce assisted schools with programs; Hansonville Mother's Club began their catering service for those who required it. Most schools used their own parents and this brought about excellent teacher/parent/children involvement through the camp. A $1000 grant from Camps branch assisted with development of a scramble net and assault wall and a pool of equipment to be hired out. Community groups were included in usage of the camp.
by the end of the year. Schools were allocated bookings at the rate of 1
camp for every 40 children, to ensure fair distribution. By the end of its
first year in operation, the camp was proving successful and an offer of a
Country Education Grant of $9000 towards a 75' x 40' recreation shed was
confirmation of this. A Camp booklet was published by Graeme Bruce to
enable schools to run their own camping programs. The camp was proving
to be self-supporting and finished the year with a credit balance of $2,304.
Application was made for full time staffing of the camp - a request that
was to be repeated often, until 1990 saw success.

1978 Priorities were set at the beginning of the year, when a new executive
group was elected. Neville Melgaard became President, Bob Watt became
Secretary and Kaye Draper remained Treasurer. At this stage, charges
were set at $12 per day or $30 per week for member schools. Boralma
School (closing) donated $620 to the camp which was used to purchase a
freezer, enabling schools to bring a week’s supply of food. Thanks to the
C.E.P. grant, Mike Lee (Greta South) and immense local support, the shed
was completed and this provided a wet weather/evening recreation shed.
Mattress covers were made by Moyhu Mothers Club. Dormitory renova-
tions were done through working bees and a concrete tank ordered for
behind the recreation shed. Bookings from outside groups became more
popular and local field naturalists used the camp and recorded bird life in
the area. By this stage, the camp had receipts of over $9000 for the year,
much of which was used in development of the site and facilities. In-service
days and working bees were used to assist as well.

1979 Plans to use prisoners from Beechworth to assist with camp painting
fell through after negotiations, but the concrete tank, curtains for one
dormitory and mattress covers were all additions to the camp. New schools
and community groups were still being admitted to camp usage. Special
Services Branch made a grant of $1500 to the camp, and Markwood/
Everton schools donated a frypan. Bookings continued to show strong
support for the camp, although the winter term was less popular.

1980 Meadow Creek P.S. closed and money was donated to the camp. A
lock-up cupboard and cassette recorder were purchased with this sum of
$200. Moves were made to acquire the Practice Flat from Benalla High
School for additional accommodation at 15 Mile Creek, when the building
program at Benalla was completed. The sale of land around the camp
caus ed concern as the local walks and activities encouraged by the local
people, might no longer be available. Pine plantations were a possibility
and it was felt that this would destroy the bush environment around the
camp. A letter from a concerned parent, Mrs. Jenny Monger, Benalla,
began the idea of purchasing land around the camp to offset this. Negotia-
tions began with the Kennedy family regarding this possible purchase. An
amount of $2000 was invested towards the establishment of the High
School Flat when it became available. Fire escape doors were built in the
dormitories. The local C.F.A., field naturalists and bushwalkers (all of
whom willingly gave their time to assist with school groups over the years)
continued to attend school camps on request.

Geoff Lacey recalls the poor cow - one of Kennedy's stock - that hanged
itself and subsequently died in some of Barry Delavadova's rope making
efforts. Barry made miles of rope for the camp - some still remains. The
scramble net lasted thirteen years! Geoff had smelt the cow for weeks and
made the grisly discovery when Jack Fleming (Benalla East Primary
School) arrived with the first camp that year. A Delavadova rope towed it
away.
1981/82 This period of time saw intense activity relating to the negotiation of land purchase surrounding the camp. Member schools, local service groups and Country Education Program were approached to assist. Eventually land (15 acres + 5 acres donated) was purchased from Kennedys at $7,500 for the camp.

Schools again paid $2.00 per head of population, Benalla Shire $250 and Country Education made a grant of $1500. Hours of work were put in by Mr. Alan Monger (Benalla) to survey the land and assist with negotiations. Small games equipment supplies were upgraded and a new hot water service was supplied as well. At this time, schools were required to supply a teacher and a parent representative to ensure a wider participation in camp administration. This proved successful for some years. As wood supplies dwindled, schools found it harder to supply their own and a contractor (J. Rowlands of Myrrhee) was employed to supply wood for the stoves. Four Music Camps were conducted through Mrs. Frances Salathiel and outside group usage continued to grow. Glenrowan Lions Club and Benalla Apex Club assisted with painting of the exterior of the buildings. Benalla West Primary School held a working bee and painted the dormitories, replaced mattress covers and made curtains. This work, along with plumbing, glazing and electrical, upgraded the camp which was becoming rather run down. A second concrete tank was purchased to increase the supply of rain water. Requests to obtain an outdoor education consultant resulted in the appointment of Karen Langford (2) from Yarrawonga Primary School.

1983 Karen Langford (Outdoor Ed. Consultant) assisted with bookings, attended camps and helped schools with programs. As Inspectorate boundaries changed with Regionalization, the camp name had to be changed to 15 Mile Creek School Camp - Wangaratta & Benalla District.

Drought and bush fire conditions made camping an unsuitable activity earlier in the year. A camp for Bush Fire victims from Mt. Macedon was organized in the May vacation by Mr. Graeme Bruce and teachers from Benalla and Wangaratta assisted with days of activities. Kaye Draper moved from the district and was replaced as Treasurer by Lance Perryman. Neville Melgaard and Bob Watt continued in their experienced roles of President and Secretary.
1984 A check list of tasks to be completed by schools when visiting the camp was instigated. A monthly roster of member schools was drawn up to involve more people in maintenance tasks.

A publicity officer (Helen Hurley) was appointed to send newsletters to all schools to involve them in the camp happenings. The Practice Flat from Benalla High School became available and plans commenced to install it. At this period, support was declining as local schools ventured further afield for camps and parents/teachers were less involved in 15 Mile Creek Camp. Every high must have its low - and out of this slump grew a change of direction and emphasis at the camp. The teachers and parents who had carried the load for so long, would now be able to hand over the running of the camp to an Outdoor Education person with the interest, expertise and time to do more. At the end of 1984, Bob Watt who had been associated with the camp since 1977, moved away and a long term contributor was lost to 15 Mile Creek.

1985 At this period, Geoff Lacey (Outdoor Ed. Consultant) became actively involved with the camp. A video was produced to publicize the potential of the camp. A Resource Book of activities, planning and local details was compiled through District Schools contributions and made available for school planning. New laminated dining room tables were provided and another second-hand combustion stove. By publishing lists of urgent work required, schools again became involved in supporting camp maintenance and offered to assist in many ways - wood collecting, painting, construction of seating, plumbing, etc. A bush dance held at the end of the year raised $970 towards a new septic system to incorporate the extra building from Benalla High School.

After the Bush Dance, Geoff Lacey spent a very nervous day being interviewed at Wangaratta Police Station regarding some confusion over the liquor licence for that bush dance night. He had visions of going to jail on a 'sly grog' charge.

The removal task of the High School Practice Flat was again performed by Bill Richardson from Benalla, and assisted by Benalla and Glenrowan Lions Clubs. Benalla Lions Club gave many hours work to paint and develop this building to occupation stage. Again schools assisted with beds and furniture donations. Equipment (formerly provided by Schools themselves), was housed at Greta South P.S. and schools could borrow Environmental materials and small games equipment. Local orienteering and hiking maps, phototrails, and activities were developed by Geoff Lacey and interest in the camp again grew. Canoes and bikes were purchased and this extended the range of activities available. A brochure to advertise the camp was designed and circularized. Seats and an outside landing were built by Benalla Technical School T.O.P. students.

The camp began moves to become an Incorporated body and, with a teacher to direct its development, changes and growth became very evident. Teacher and parent involvement supported this work all through.

1986 Funds were available to complete reconstruction of the septic system ($3000.00). Investigations began into the feasibility of construction of a dam at the camp for environmental activities, water sports and a back up water supply. Despite lengthy investigations, the site proved too expensive at this stage for storage of large areas of water. Further funding from C.E.P. provided $3000 for 4 canoes and a trailer.

A storage shed was created at the end of the recreation shed costing $1900. Equipment from Greta South along with bikes and canoes was then stored
at the camp. A ropes course constructed on the creek, proved a very popular addition to camp programs.

Major plans were drawn up for facility up-grading ablution block, bulk gas, new gas stoves and hot water services, a barbecue and a verandah outside the kitchen were organized for the following year. Support and usage of the camp continued to grow. Brian Chatham's involvement through Greta South Primary School and its facilities contributed a great deal to the camp, as he assisted Geoff in many ways.

1987 For the first time, a maintenance person could be employed at the camp. Joe Northey began work in Term 4 to open the camp, provide water and fires, and attend to small maintenance tasks. This proved a boon to all who used the camp, as well as the committee. Garbage collection via Big Bins was provided. New lino in the kitchen, a new overhead water tank and dormitory painting were developments that improved the overall comfort of campers.

Neville Melgaard - after 10 years at the helm - retired as Camp President leaving the camp reluctantly as he had been involved since the initial site inspections that began the concept in 1975.

That year Halley's Comet night was a highlight - following a successful In-Service day with Gould League, a small event was planned to observe the comet from the camp, with the expertise of the lecturers to inform all who wish to come.

Expecting 40-50 people, a small family barbecue was planned. So popular was the night; being advertised through all schools - 500-600 arrived. The people, dust, dogs, kids were everywhere. Tractor rides carried the kids up the hill behind Lindseys to view the great event and the people (hundreds of 'em) tramped up in the dust in a never-ending procession, reminiscent of a Lourdes pilgrimage via torch light. The public address system broke down; the comet was a hazy blur, yet everyone agreed it was a great family night socially and certainly the biggest event held at the camp ever.
One little old lady of eighty, refused all offers of a lift up the hill via tractor rides driven by Geoff Lacey, Brian Chatham and Gary O'Keefe said "I wouldn't have missed it for the world". Brian missed her later and drove back up the hill to find her sitting on a log, swinging her legs and waiting for her ride down. That night, people slept indoors, outdoors, anywhere and retired next day, praising the camp and its facilities.

1988 Plans came into fruition with the major upgrade in ablution facilities. The equipment room beside the original ablution block was converted to contain additional showers, toilets and basins. Bulk gas supplied the two new stoves and gas hot water service. A wood heater was installed in the teachers flat. Joe Northey's services continued as caretaker.

A bush dance later in the year again proved a popular fund-raise.

Abseiling became an option with the building of a climbing tower in the camp grounds to teach the elementary skills. This was built by local P.E. teachers.

A camp T-shirt was designed and sold well. Glenrowan Primary School concreted the new verandah area outside the dining room. At last, after annual requests for staffing, .5 staffing was made available. Geoff Lacey was appointed (after years of work assisting while as a consultant) to be based at the camp for 2.5 days per week and the remainder of the time at Greta South. A job prescription was drawn up and an office established at the camp.

Secretarial help at Greta South was provided at last for camp newsletters, bookings and book keeping, formerly done by teachers in their "spare" time. Things had come a long way since the first camp in 1977.

1989 Twenty new vinyl mattress covers were made this year. Coats for all weather protection were provided as many children came ill-equipped for wet weather. Programs established by Geoff in previous years were more fully developed and all schools commented on the increased range of activities that were available through his attendance at their camps. The flying fox was a great hit!

Half-time staffing proved so successful that a submission was made once again for full-time staffing. Schools were asked to support this request and a full time temporary appointment (Kim Scanlon) was made for 1990. Benalla Lions Club were again active at the camp and began plans to repair the ablations block roof (completed in 1990).

Land surrounding the camp was being sold off - again threatening programs developed in the bush outside the previously purchased area. Once again, the small but dedicated camp committee assisted Geoff to begin negotiations to protect and expand the camp.

1990 Full time staffing and a new face in Kim Scanlon arrived with new ideas, youth, lots of energy and the willingness to apply these to her new appointment. Industrial action caused the cancellation of most of Term 1’s camps. Kim used this time to introduce herself to schools, paint the kitchen, set up her office area - which now included 1 days clerical assistance (Maxine Roach), a computer and photocopier. Curtains were made for the dining room and teachers flat, equipment organized, floor coverings installed and a general 'spruce up' of the camp appeared very quickly. Thanks to Geoff Lacey's hard work with Kim Scanlon and Gary O'Keefe, 230 acres of land was purchased for the camp, costing $145,000. The Conservation Trust contributed $110,000 of this, the Ministry of Education
$10,000, IBM (Wangaratta) $5000 and the Camp was to find the balance of $17,500. Schools were invited to fund-raise towards this aim and another popular Bush Dance arranged, raising $540.50 for the land purchase appeal.

The camp was almost fully booked for the remainder of the year. A submission was made for an environmental centre at the camp through Country Ed funding and has received funding of $10,800 from this organisation for a two-stage development of this centre.

Benalla Lions Club painted the Richardson Building and put guards over the skylights in the recreation shed.

Dormitories were again painted, a new drying room established with a washing machine and drying cabinet installed. Fly screens were also added. In-service days and working bees continued to develop the camp facilities and programs. The bicycles were progressively overhauled, a new scramble net purchased, new kitchen equipment and a replacement pump added to improve shower pressure.

New gardens were established around the existing building. The Environmental Education program at the camp was expanded.

The iron bunks and old beds in the teachers' flat were hated by most visitors to the camp. Gary O'Keefe (Committee President) heard about some pine bunks from a disused Apex Camp at Oxley Reserve. Committee members spent two night shifting them in trailers. When they arrived, they could not be fitted through the doors! So they had to be dismantled and reassembled!

Through the generosity of Bogong Camp, 15 Mile Creek Camp was donated thirty “written off” back packs and overpants to allow children to carry a day pack each on bushwalks.

Kim Scanlon, first full-time camp director has some comments to add on her impressions of 15 Mile Creek in 1990.

_The famous “Mouse in the Photocopier” episode_

In March/April, a mice plague hit the camp. Maxine came into the office for her normal Monday morning work and was driven back out of it by a terrible stench, emanating from the area of the photocopier. She proceeded to avoid it and carry on regardless, until she went to photocopy something. All that came out was a “a black spotted sheet of paper”. Further investigation of the photocopier found that there was a dead mouse plastered on all fours to the drum of it. Kim and Maxine decided that now was the time to play the “helpless female” act and a kindly visiting teacher (male) undertook the delicate operation, using a pair of BBQ tongs to prise the little beast from its last resting place. At least the horrible smell disappeared after that!

PS - no long term damage was done to the photocopier either.

So, what for the future? A general trend in education presently is to teach a lot of Environmental Education to students and the camp is benefiting from this. Teachers are looking for natural environments to study and they are bringing children to the camp as much to study the local flora and fauna as for the adventure activities that the camp offers.

There has been great interest generated about the camp from a
wide area and people from all over Victoria are asking if they can book the camp for school and/or community groups. They view the camp as a comfortable yet economical facility with a lovely setting for their groups to visit.

The present camp committee has many plans for the future. Some of these include:

- Eventually staff the camp with three full-time teachers so that only one teacher need be released from school to accompany groups that visit the camp.
- The development of the facility to enable groups to use the camp every weekend.
- The building of a mud-brick and log environmental centre, constructed in the main by school groups which visit the camp. This will hopefully be built in 1991. It will be built onto the end of the dining room and will house a library/resource area, an indoor ‘bush cooking’ area, an area for displays about the natural environment and a workshop area. (Eventually maybe, all the buildings will be replaced with mud-brick buildings.)
- The development of gardens around the buildings and hopefully the extension of the dormitories.
- The building of the dam will still take place and is a matter of priority after the land sale is completed.
- Parts of the land that the camp has purchased in 1990 will be reforested.
- The development of an overnight camping area on the purchased land so that small groups can sleep in tents overnight but only a short distance away from the main camp.

The best thing about 15 Mile Creek Camp is the sense of ownership that people feel about the camp. Some teachers and parents return year after year with school groups and all can tell stories about the happy times they’ve had in helping to develop it.

Some say 15 Mile Creek is “rough and ready” but the thing about the camp is that it is an evolutionary place - it keeps on improving. Whilst there are still people around who are keen to develop the camp and prepared to put in the hard work to do this, the camp will continue to evolve.

15 Mile Creek Camp is famous in the Wangaratta and Benalla areas. If the camp makes an appeal for help to anyone in these districts, they will say that they know of the camp because their kids, or friends children have had a great time on a visit there. Now, and in years to come, the children of these children will no doubt visit 15 Mile Creek Camp and depart with fond memories as well.

Kim Scanlon
15 Mile Creek Camp (Benalla and Wangaratta district Schools) has proved it can be done - a community-owned, community-run facility that grows and changes to meet community needs.

To those who had the foresight to plan it, and those people who have been involved with the camp over the years - congratulations on a job well done.
EXISTING FACILITIES
FIFTEEN MILE CREEK
PRIMARY SCHOOL

GRETA SOUTH - MYREE ROAD
TEACHERS!

ARE YOU FINDING THAT TEACHING
FAILS TO OFFER A SUITABLE OUTLET FOR
AGGRESSION? THE CATHARTIC THEORY OF
PLAY SUGGESTS THAT A SUITABLE OUTLET
IS ESSENTIAL.

GIVE YOURSELF A BREAK—WRECK
A SHED OR EVEN A TOOT! THE CATHARTIC
EFFECTS ARE GUARANTEED. JOIN THE
EMOTIONALLY STABLE TEACHERS WHO DEVOTE
THEIR SUNDAYS TO—"WRECKING TOOTS."

WHERE:

TOOT 1 CHESNEY VALE P.S.
TOOT 2 BUNGEEF WEST P.S.
TOOT 3 YIM BCRUN P.S.

MILE CREEK

WHEN:— SUNDAY 9:30 AM (3/8/75).

EQUIPMENT REQUIRED.
(a) Plenty of aggression.
(b) 3 Tray trucks—one at each venue.
(c) Aggressive weapons (shifters, bars, hammers etc.).
(d) Bodies.

WHY?

1 AS ABOVE.

2 THESE BUILDING MATERIALS ARE DESPERATELY NEEDED AT FIFTEEN MILE CREEK SO THAT THE LION'S CLUB CAN PROCEED WITH THE TOILET/SHOWER BLOCK.

IF YOU CAN ATTEND ANY ONE OF THE VENUES OR SUPPLY A TRUCK PLEASE CONTACT PE. OFFICE — 215062. FRIDAY 1/8/75.

REGARDS. BARRY DELLAUCEDDA (WRECKERS AMNON)