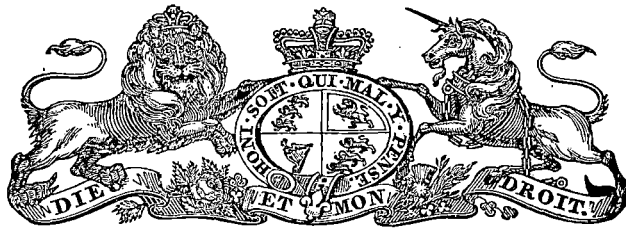


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PARLIAMENT OF TASMANIA.

STATE RESERVE AT MOUNT WELLINGTON :

REPORT BY GEORGE S. PERRIN, F.L.S., F.R.S. (TAS.), CONSERVATOR
OF FORESTS TO THE GOVERNMENT OF TASMANIA.

Presented to both Houses of Parliament by His Excellency's Command.



REPORT ON THE STATE RESERVE AT MOUNT WELLINGTON.

Crown Lands Office, Hobart, 23rd November, 1886.

SIR,

I HAVE the honor to draw your attention to the state of the Public Reserve around Mount Wellington, and to the urgent necessity which exists for the preservation of the timber thereon. I beg to submit for your approval the following Report on the subject, which I think will show conclusively the absolute necessity of prompt and energetic action being taken to prevent this fine public estate becoming so damaged as to be useless for the purpose for which it was originally intended.

I have the honor to be,

Sir,

Your most obedient Servant,

GEO. S. PERRIN, *Conservator of Forests.*

*The Honorable N. J. BROWN, Minister of
Lands and Works.*

THE forest, on leaving the Finger-post on the Huon Road, consists of stringy-bark of fair size. The greater portion of this timber has, however, matured, and is now rapidly going to decay; and the large number of standing trees of full growth which occupies the ground, to the detriment of the young trees, requires a considerable thinning out.

Fires appear to be a constant and regular scourge during the summer months, and are caused by excursionists, chiefly boys. These fires damage the timber very much, and kill off, or at any rate ruin the young saplings which should take the place of the older trees.

Troops of boys, armed with tomahawks and guns, are everywhere to be met with in holiday time, lighting fires, chopping down saplings, or setting fire to the forest by the use of inflammable gun-wads, &c., besides other depredations, including the destruction of ferns, which, if persisted in, must inevitably create a great dearth of these plants in course of time, to the detriment of the Reserve.

The great advantages possessed by this grand recreation-ground, its nearness to the city, and other natural beauties, should make the proper care and supervision of a place so eminently suited to the wants of a large and ever increasing city the first care of its citizens, and more particularly in a place like Hobart, which is famed all over the world for the natural beauty of its surroundings; and I think I may safely say Mount Wellington—its timbered slopes and gullies—occupy a leading if not the chief position among such surroundings, and hence should be jealously guarded from acts of disgraceful vandalism now so common. The tracks are greatly neglected, and might, with a small expenditure, be readily made into a fair road the greater part of the way up,—in fact as far as the Ploughed Field.

“The Springs,” from whence a splendid view of the City and environs is obtainable, is a dreary, miserable, neglected-looking place in its present condition, which, under other circumstances, might be made one of the most pleasant resorts around the City of Hobart.

As the “Ploughed Field” seems to be the chief obstruction to the ascent of the Mountain by the weaker sex, with a little trouble and small expense this stumbling-block might be avoided; or, if no better route could be found, I would suggest the placing of a plank pathway over the Field, with a wire or rope handrail.

On reaching the top or flat plateau above the Ploughed Field, clumps of willows, Scotch pine (*pinus sylvestris*), and other hardy trees might be planted in suitable localities among the rocks, and a Government Shelter-shed might also be provided near the "Trig." Station, with a few trees wherever the soil could be found deep enough for the purpose. The expenditure of a little money in the direction I have pointed out would be productive of good all round. The protection afforded the existing timber, and the increase by planting, would add greatly to the attractiveness of the Mount "outing," and the enjoyment of visitors; whilst the main object of these improvements—the shelter and water supply to the City—would be conserved at the same time.

In connection with the conservation of the timber on this Reserve, I would like to make the following remarks:—Should the Mount become denuded of its timber, the consequences to the water supply of Hobart would be very serious, as trees are well known conservators of springs,—preventing by their shade the too rapid evaporation of water by the direct action of the sun; by their roots, in absorbing and retaining moisture in the soil; by their leaves acting chemically upon the air, moistening and cooling the atmosphere around such trees; by the prevention of floods and the rapid cutting away of the soil by flood waters, which invariably follow the entire denudation of timber lands. A notable instance of this is afforded by the present condition of Knocklofty on the side nearest the Town. Here may be found huge chasms cut away by flood water, which will cost perhaps hundreds of pounds to fill in and reclaim. As Knocklofty now is, so will the sides and slopes of the Mount become if the present destruction of timber is allowed to go on.

The next phase of the question is a climatic one, and is fraught with much interest to the community. The clearing away of forest land in masses is frequently followed by hurricanes or winds of a gusty cyclonic character, which rush with great fury down open or treeless slopes of mountain ridges, and, meeting with but little resistance, gather force in their onward career, and perhaps culminate in the wrecking of houses or shipping. The dust-storms of this city illustrate this species of wind, and the more the forest land is cleared the worse these storms will become. Again, in winter the icy winds from the snow-clad top of the Mount, in the absence of trees, will gather no warmth from their foliage, and the city become more liable each year to the effects of the cold winds from the gullies and slopes of Mount Wellington. In the summer months the converse of this is the case. Trees by their chemical action absorb oxygen from the air and cause decomposition of carbon, and therefore are most effective agents in the purification of foul odours arising from a great city, in addition to the coolness and moisture afforded by their leaves in respiration, and thus cooling heated air, &c. to a degree little suspected by those unacquainted with the chemical action of plant life.

The importance of conserving the timber trees existing near great towns cannot be too strongly insisted on, and in view of the destruction going on from time to time upon the Wellington Reserve, mainly by fires, I deem it a most urgent duty to bring the matter under your immediate notice, and in support of this Report will quote the words of His Excellency the Administrator of the Government at the June meeting of the Royal Society of Tasmania in 1884:—"The Chairman (His Honor Judge Dobson) stated that he wished to bring under the notice of the meeting a subject which he was sure would interest them all. He alluded to the wanton and mischievous destruction of the tree-ferns at Mount Wellington. Many glens and other localities on the Mountain had been utterly robbed of all their beauty and attraction by the stupid destruction of these trees, some of which he had no doubt represented a growth of 50 to 100 years. He was sorry to say, too, that this destruction was permitted by many of whom better things might have been expected, and in very many cases for the mere decoration of a ballroom. Trees were cut down which we could never hope to see replaced in a lifetime. He thought something might be done to stop this senseless waste of beauty, as far at least as the Mount Wellington Reserve was concerned, by constituting it a People's Park, and making it penal to remove ferns and other trees. If Government took the initiative in the preservation of the ferns it was probable that private individuals, who may act rather in a spirit of thoughtlessness than otherwise, might be induced to follow the good example."

I am not aware of the steps which were taken by the Government when the above was brought under their notice by a committee appointed at the meeting of the Society; but the fact remains that the destruction is still going on, and it appears to me that nothing short of the most stringent regulations and penalties will put a stop to the acts of vandalism now going on day after day; and in order to mitigate the evil, if not to stop it entirely, I beg to offer the following suggestions:—

1. That the Mount Wellington Reserve be placed under the care of the Forest Department, with the view of systematic improvements being carried out on a fixed plan.
2. That a small sum annually be voted for the maintenance and improvements on the Reserve.
3. That a young active Caretaker be appointed, whose duty would be to supervise the Reserve, to prevent depredation and fires by looking sharply after excursionists and boys at holiday time, and the carrying out of improvements under the immediate supervision of the Conservator of Forests.
4. The reservation and planting of "The Springs" with exotic trees and laying out of the grounds as a pleasure resort, together with the formation of fern-tree avenues at suitable places, and the protection of existing ferns, shrubs, and trees.

5. The formation of a carriage drive from the Huon Road to the Springs, and the planting of an avenue thereto.
6. The removal of the present unsightly buildings, and the establishment of a proper house of accommodation more befitting the requirements of visitors than the present wretched tenement.
7. The making of a plank track across the Ploughed Field for the benefit of lady excursionists.
8. The improvement of existing tracks in levelling, filling in, and sloping, &c.
9. The pruning and thinning out of young saplings, the formation of ferneries in the gullies, and the conservation and improvement of existing timber.
10. The clearing off of old logs and dead wood, its disposal by sale or otherwise, and the enactment of a stringent code of regulations, with severe penalties, &c.

These improvements could be taken in hand gradually, and might be spread over a number of years; and the caretaker's time, when not engaged in supervision, could be profitably occupied in carrying out the above improvements under the immediate supervision and direction of the Conservator of Forests, whilst the employment of a young and active man, with occasional assistance, would ensure the constant and systematic progression of improvements.

In many places above the Springs, where the timber has been killed apparently by fire numerous sites of great beauty present themselves for the planting of willows and other hardy trees, for ornamental purposes.

In planting exotic trees great care must be taken not to plant in rows (except for avenue purposes) so as to give too much of a garden or artificial appearance to the landscape, which is too often done when improvements of this kind are left to the taste of an ordinary gardener.

The improvement of such a reserve as Mount Wellington comes more within the forester's art than that of the landscape gardener's, which is of itself a special branch of horticulture, whilst the former deals only with arboriculture.

With all due respect to Corporations and Municipal Bodies, it is not often that a number of persons of varying tastes, sitting in solemn conclave, can evolve a scheme of landscape adornment off-hand,—such attempts have more often than not resulted in failure; as a rule, very little taste is displayed, and a large amount of money is often squandered, and (with the exception of street planting) very little to show for it. The treatment of the parks around the City of Adelaide until quite recently was a notable instance of this.

For these reasons it is always better that improvements requiring special knowledge and the exercise of judgment and artistic skill should be left in the hands of one or two, or at most three individuals, whilst the carrying out of detailed plans should be left to a responsible officer capable of carrying them out satisfactorily.

I have therefore much pleasure in submitting this Report, and trust it may be the means of drawing attention to the many evils existing with reference to this area, and that steps will be taken to preserve a reserve which, under proper treatment, should become one of the most popular resorts in the Colonies, and an object of pride to all Tasmanians.*

GEO. S. PERRIN, *Conservator of Forests.*
23rd November, 1886.

* NOTE.—Since the above Report was written a disastrous fire took place in January of the present year, when a large portion of the Reserve in the neighbourhood of the "Organ Pipes" was devastated, and plants, trees, and shrubs were destroyed which will take a lifetime to replace.

There appears to be little, if any, supervision exercised over the Reserve, and no attempt seems to be made to arrest the progress of a fire when once started, whilst the owners or occupiers of adjoining holdings are largely to blame through the careless way in which their "clearing" operations are performed, as they are apparently the chief agents in fire raising, aided largely by woodcutters, "larrikins," and the carelessness of excursionists.