**HOW THE UNIVERSITY CAME TO AQUIRE NANYA STATION – Martin Westbrooke**

**The story of how the University came to purchase Nana Station is a rather complex one that involves a number of serendipitous events. The following is a brief outline of how it occurred.**

Following completion of a BSc in botany and zoology at London University and a Post Graduate Certificate in Education at Leicester University I travelled overland to Australia in 1967/8. After teaching at Newcastle Boys High for three years and Longerenong Agricultural College for three years I came to the State College of Victoria at Ballarat in February 1974 as Lecturer in Ecology. At that time there had been a tradition of mid-year trips for students, generally to capital cities, with staff allocated to supervision. The idea did not excite me and along with two art lecturers, John Crump and Ian Hemingway proposed an outback trip to look at ecological and historic features in western New South Wales. We arranged hiring of three Landrovers and I planned a route through north west Victoria and on to various sites in western NSW including Lake Victoria, Broken Hill, Mootwingie Historic Site and Lake Mungo. Through a friend in the NSW National Parks and Wildlife Service I also arranged a visit to a lesser known Aboriginal site on a private property, Sturt Meadows, between Broken Hill and Mootwingie. The trip was successful thoroughly enjoyed by the 20 students and three staff. It was my first visit to outback NSW, an area that was to become very significant in my later career. It included a visit to Mungo, soon after the significant discoveries by Jim Bowler and John McGee and before it became a National Park.

This proved to be the last year of these College wide trips but the following year along with other biology lecturers Pat Prevett, Ian Henderson and Ian Gribble organised a similar trip for our ecology students. This followed a similar pattern which continued in subsequent years with our primary education students studying ecology units and from 1976, Bachelor of Education (Physical Education) students taking a science major. A particularly rewarding part of the trip was the visit to Sturt Meadows Station where, apart from visiting the significant heritage site included an introduction to pastoral management by our generous hosts, Peter and Mary Bevan. Following the merger of SCVB with Ballarat Institute of Advanced Education in 1976 the biology group, now consisting of Martin Westbrooke, Pat Prevett, Barry Kentish and Stafford McKnight, moved to Mt Helen where we established over time the BAppSc Biological Resource Management (later renamed BAppSc Environmental Management). It was a natural progression that these students would also benefit from exposure to the ecology and land management issues of arid Australia and so the excursion evolved to meet these needs. In particular this led to more extended visits to key sites including Red Bluff Fauna and Flora Reserve, Sturt Meadows and the Barrier Ranges and Mallee Cliffs National Park. During this time I learnt a great deal about pastoral management from Peter Bevans.

Student visits to the seldom visited Mallee Cliffs National Park led to close involvement with the NSW National Parks and Wildlife Service and over a few years visits Martin along with Technical Assistant Lisa Morcom (now Macaulay) published a paper in the NSW Herbarium journal *Cunninghamia* on the vegetation of the park (Morcom & Westbrooke 1990). In 198 NPWS were considering the purchase of two pastoral properties, Ennisvale and Tarrara, in far western NSW as a National Park and the Regional Manager asked me if I would go to look at them to report on their ecological values and vegetation condition. In September 1987, while undertaking a study of *Myoporum* woodland for the Land Conservation Council I took the opportunity to visit the properties and found that they incorporated very intact natural vegetation which I found related to a short grazing history and generally low grazing pressure due to generally unpalatable vegetation. I found the area so interesting that I asked the owner if we could use the property for the 1988 student excursion, to which he agreed. Later in the year Barry Kentish and I made another visit to plan aspects of the fieldwork and develop minor research projects for students. Unfortunately, a week before the excursion the owner advised that the visit was no longer possible, a major problem as students were at that stage on a break and developing their research proposals. Aerial photographs we had obtained included the adjacent property, Nanya so I obtained contact details and rang the owner, Norm Scadding who after I had explained our predicament said we were welcome to use Nanya for the excursion. It was at that stage an outstation for the adjacent property Belvedere and no one was living there. Students were able to readily adapt their projects to the new area and a very successful field trip ensued and was repeated the following year.

In subsequent years the annual arid zone field trip utilised other properties in the area, Tarrara (1993, 1994), which had in the meantime changed hands, and Loch Lily (1990, 1991). Alongside these annual field trips I was able to obtain funding to undertake more extensive studies of the vegetation of the wider Scotia area which led to a significant publication in *Cunninghamia* (Westbrooke et al 1998). In 1992 I had also embarked on PhD studies into the ecology of Belah woodland with significant elements of my fieldwork based in and around the Scotia area often staying at Tarawi Station with Trevor and Mignon Brown. They were during this time running into financial difficulties and I prepared a case for the property to be purchased by NPWS (who had previously failed to purchase Ennisvale and Tarrara) as a nature reserve. Through our vegetation studies in the area it was clear that the most interesting area ecologically was Nanya Station due to high quality vegetation, many rare species and the presence of an undisturbed natural system of salt lakes. During this time Nanya had changed hands and after developing a friendship with the new owner, Rob Taylor, I came to an agreement for UB to tidy the derelict cottage and use Nanya as a research base. It was used in this way through an informal agreement from 1996 to 2000 when the property was again sold to a sandmining company BeMax Pty Ltd. I was able to obtain agreement for the informal arrangements to continue. During this time, although no longer the owners of Nanya I developed a very strong friendship with Norm, Norma and Joe Scadding of the adjacent Belvedere Station from whom I learnt much about the issues of managing a property such as Nanya. In 2002 it became obvious that BeMax had lost interest in the site and, fearing that due to the low wool prices and low quality feed the property may be purchased for goat ‘farming’ , I approached NPWS to recommend its purchase as a National Park or Nature Reserve. Those responsible for acquisitions were strongly supportive but, because of the still existing mining exploration lease, they were unable to proceed as it was against NSW Government policy.

At this time, through the Centre for Environmental Management I was supervising a review of the National Heritage Trust funding programs for World Heritage Areas and the National Reserve System. During a visit to Canberra for this review I was able to investigate with the then Head of Section David Wilcox the possibility of support for purchase of Nanya by the University of Ballarat. He indicated that his department would be supportive but final decisions were with the Minister (Senator Hill). I determined that BeMax would be willing to sell and prepared a briefing for the then new Vice Chancellor Kerry Cox. Kerry approved the proposal and I proceeded to negotiate with BeMax and prepare a National Heritage Trust bid. This was approved and following a lengthy legal process, ably assisted by Rowena Coutts, led finally to formal purchase in 2004.

Since that time extensive use has been made of Nanya by undergraduate student on annual excursions, Honours and HDR students and staff research. Major events in ensuing years have included:

* Long term research project into flooding of Olary Creek 2000 – present.
* National Heritage Trust/Caring for Country grants in 2006 and 2010.
* Stewardship grant from the Lower Murray Darling CMA in 2006.
* Funding under endangered species program for purchase of additional adjacent 10,000ha to ensure complete protection of the salt lake system 2009.
* Major ARC/NSW Environmental Trust funding for investigation of ecological impacts of ground tank closure. 2008 – 2011.
* Production of brochure documenting Nanya’s assets (Westbrooke 2010).
* Loss of roof of kitchen block in a severe storm in November 2009
* Funding for upgrade of infrastructure through a commonwealth grant 2011, integrated with restoration of kitchen block
* Formal launch of new facilities in May 2013
* Publication of paper on the history and significance of the Scotia area in the *Proceedings of the Linnean Society of New South Wales* (Westbrooke 2012)
* Five year funding from National Carbon Biodiversity Program 2012-2017.

Over the years we have received great assistance and advice from pastoralists in the region. These include Peter and Mary Bevans of Sturt Meadows, Norm, Norma and Joe Scadding of Belvedere, Trevor and Mignon Brown of Tarawi, Geoff Rhodda (dec) of Wemba, Alf, Maxine and Steve Withers of Springwood.

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