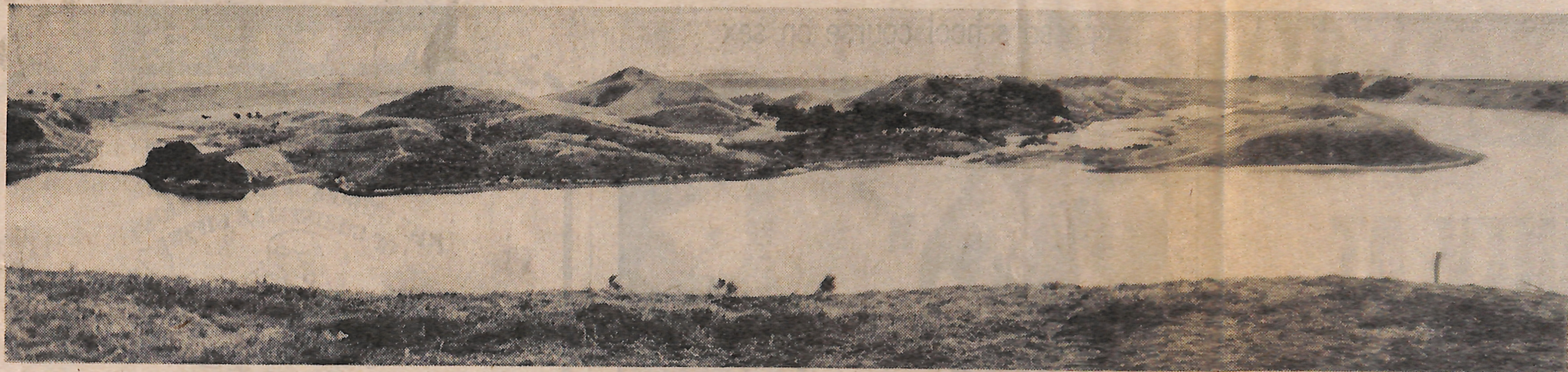


GRAHAM PIZZEY, The Herald naturalist, writes about the 'healing' of Tower Hill State game reserve.



Tower Hill . . . formed by volcanic action.

# A lake comes to life again

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YOU happen on it suddenly where the Prince's Highway tops a rise eight miles past Warrnambool, 170 miles from Melbourne.

The white farmhouses and green and chocolate-brown pastures and croplands fall away to an unexpected landscape of a huge crater lake with steep banks, its centre filled with a large island of volcanic hills, with several minor islands adjacent.

This is Tower Hill, now a 1500 acre State game reserve, once an active volcano. Geologists believe it was active until about 6000 years ago, when its peak collapsed inwards, forming the crater. Subsequently smaller eruptions within the crater formed the islands and continued to build the banks of the crater with layers of ash and other debris.

No one knows when the lake was first filled, but today it lies sunlit in misty silence. A pair of feeding black swans and their young ring the water far below, and a swamp hawk sails over reedbeds along the shore.

Behind them, on the slope, is a luscious plantation of young eucalypts and wattles, on a further slope are vertical furrows, ready for more planting. Around the lake are duck nest-boxes on posts.

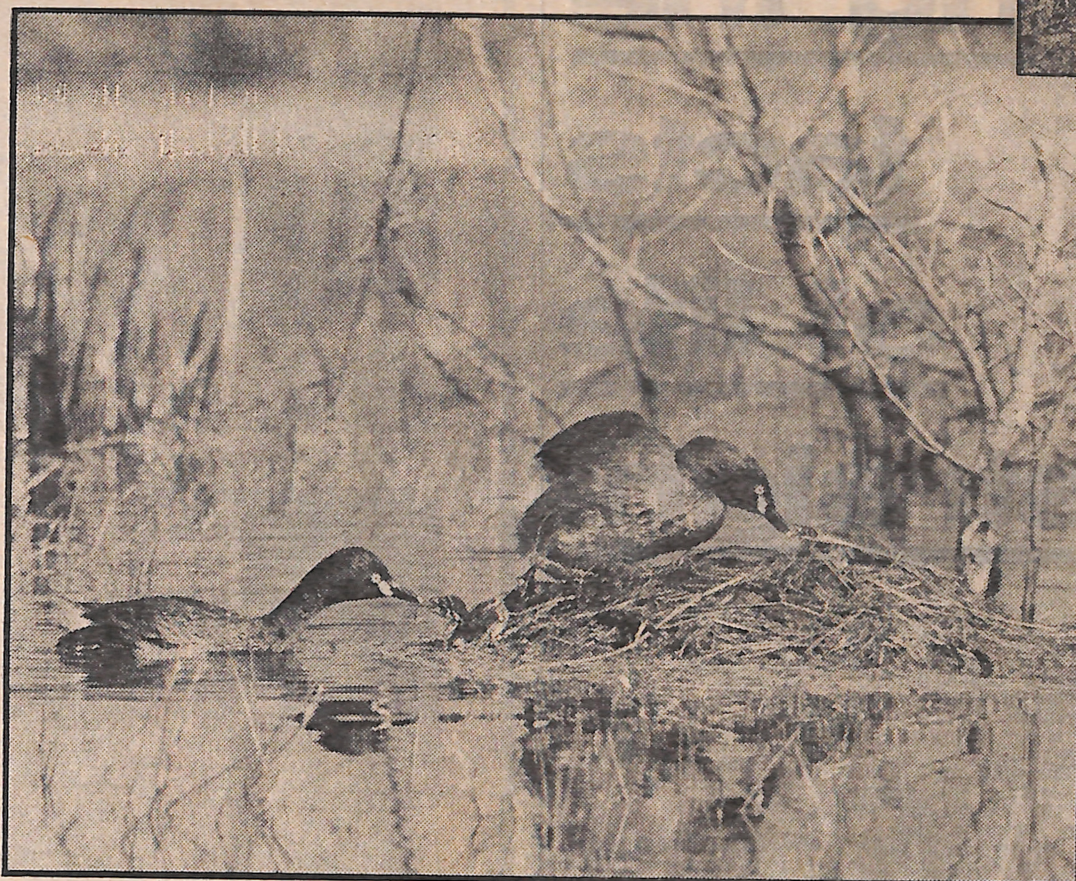
Intrigued by these signs of obvious care, you swing your car down the steep entrance drive, across the causeway and on to the island. Another quarter mile, and here, hidden in a fold of the rounded volcanic hills on the island, is a single building of great beauty and presence, its low domed roof, finished in volcanic scoria, reflecting their rounded shapes.

## Harmony

This beautiful, glass-walled building, as simple and stable as those surrounding hills, was conceived in great love by the architect Robin Boyd, who died within weeks of its completion. Among more ambitious buildings he created, it will stand perhaps as one of the simplest but most direct reflections of his belief in the essential harmony of man with his surrounding world.

It is a belief central to an adventure in understanding being developed at Tower Hill by the Fisheries and Wildlife Department, with the assistance of committed environmentalists like Robin Boyd.

The building and the display it houses will be officially opened by the Chief Secretary, Mr Hamer, next Friday. Essentially this is a



story of restoration of the Tower Hill environment, with an intriguing twist to it. In 1855, James Dawson, a district pioneer with an uncharacteristic appreciation for the natural world, commissioned a travelling landscape artist, Eugene von Guerard, to paint Tower Hill.

As Dawson later wrote, "In the early days of this colony there was to be seen between Port Fairy and Warrnambool one of the most beautiful and interesting specimens of an extinct volcano in all Victoria . . . Tower Hill and lake, attracted my attention so much, that fortunately for future generations, I commissioned a celebrated artist to paint the scene in oil on a large scale, and he carried out my wishes faithfully and beautifully."

That detailed landscape records a wilderness settled in a harmony of years. A mature forest of manna gums, sheoaks and other timber, clothes the slopes, stands of white-flowering woolly tea-tree line the shore of the islands, parrots flash through the trees, and waterfowl ring the lake.

A party of aboriginals camps among the trees — their ancestors were here so long that stone

axe-heads and dingo bones have been found buried in the volcanic ash of the crater's rim. It was a world in which they lived in harmony — but not the settlers who took over Tower Hill and "developed" it. The timber was soon cut for firewood, and fires cleared the rest for stock grazing. Foreign grasses were introduced, the vegetables were grown on the lower slopes, and town effluent was piped into the lake.

## Poison

Returning to the district in 1891, Dawson found chaos. He wrote in bitterness to the *Camperdown Chronicle*, "I was amazed to find everything altered, the fine trees on the cones, and in the craters of the islands, all gone excepting half a dozen or so. But a thousand times worse than this ruthless destruction of ornamental timber, the larger portion of the lake is made into a setting, stinking mud pool full of Malarious matter, sufficient to poison the whole neighborhood . . ."

Later, introduced pines

were grown, volcanic material was quarried, and in general Tower Hill remained a poor, alien shadow of its former self until the 1950s when the first attempts at reclamation were made, initially by local naturalists.

In 1961 Tower Hill, which had always remained Crown Land, was included in the growing system of State Wildlife Reserves, under control of Fisheries and Wildlife Department.

With the guiding inspiration of Mr A. D. Butcher, the department's director, and the contributions of a number of lively talents, a plan of restoration and interpretation was developed.

The then superintendent of game management, a laconic but far-seeing biologist Max Downes, saw the possibilities of the place as a wildlife reserve, and of using the von Guerard painting as a blueprint for restoration.

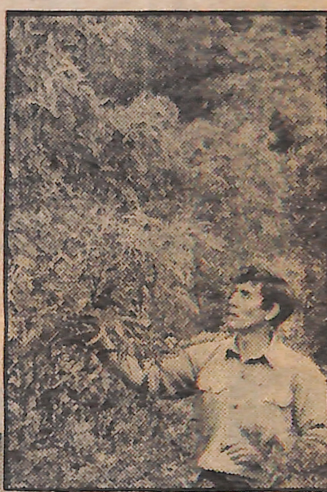
Miss Helen Aston of the Department of Botany at Melbourne University, and Cliff Beauglehole, a remarkable Portland botanist-naturalist, developed a list of native trees and shrubs, part-identified from the von Guerard painting,

and part from knowledge of persisting native species at Tower Hill and in the district.

How do you go about revegetating a 1,500 acre reserve, even when a substantial portion of it is water? Gavin Cerni, the game management officer at Tower Hill responsible for planting more than 80,000 trees over the last 7 years, would answer that you do as much as you can yourself, but seek assistance from interested sections of the community — both as a means of getting the job done, and to make the reserve part of the personal experience and understanding of the public who own it.

Six years after the first major planting, the growth of Tower Hill's new woodlands is far enough advanced to see a glimpse of the future. Next year, another 20,000 trees will be planted; and if this progress is maintained, in 6 years natural regeneration should be sufficient to complete a maturing mosaic of woodlands. It will then be necessary to establish a shrub layer of such species as musk daisy bush, and sweet bursaria — a long process of healing one wishes James Dawson might have lived to see.

The natural world itself is a great healer. Given the opportunity, and time, it will cover its own scars. Already many species of birds have moved back to Tower Hill. In the spreading woodlands last week I saw and heard pardalotes, silvereyes, thornbills, blue wrens and others, and saw a goshawk hunting low through the new trees. Emus and spiny anteaters have been rein-



Gavin Cerni, game management officer at Tower Hill, inspects one of the two-year-old manna gums.

Little Grebes and young at a floating nest — one of the many waterbirds to be seen at Tower Hill.

troduced, and also sugar gliders — but since the gums are too young to produce hollow logs for them, these had to be supplied.

Because stock grazing has been banned, the edges of the lake now support stands of reeds, and heavy bracken, hemlock (not a native) and other growth. Reed-warblers fill the air with their strident quart-quarty-quarty calls, and there has been a good response by waterfowl.

As the reclamation proceeds, much will be learned about the environmental needs of the trees that have been re-established, about the shrubs that will follow, about the needs of the various aquatic plants in the lake, and around its shores. Already studies of phosphate levels influenced by detergents in local drainage, and the level of alga and plankton in various sections of the lake are being documented.

## Tapestry

In turn, the living requirements of the hundreds of forms of wildlife there now, or that will gradually be released, or self-introduced, will be recorded.

And as that tapestry of knowledge gains color, it will be passed on to visitors in the form of a continually updated interpretative display designed by the Melbourne artist, Robert Ingpen, whose outstanding capabilities in this field are becoming well known through his work at the Swan Hill Folk Museum, for the CSIRO, and for United Nations agencies.

Ingpen's initial display in the visitor centre which includes von Guerard's painting, presented by the granddaughter of James Dawson, takes you through the geological history of Tower Hill, its discovery and exploitation by Europeans, and then its rediscovery and re-creation in environmental terms.

