

# Our love affair with the swamp



## THE REST IS HISTORY

By PETER BUTTERS  
Ballarat historian

**B**ALLARAT'S tourism drawcard for many years was its well-known lake and Botanical Gardens.

The city has watched the transformation of the Black Swamp from its humble beginnings to its past splendour, and now as it endeavours to return to its roots.

We can visualise its origins when *Ballarat & Vicinity 1894* commented: "This now beautiful sheet of water would be hardly recognisable at the present time as the rush bordered and reed clogged Yuille's Swamp of the early days.

"In place of the mass of matted reeds and slimy ooze which once filled its bed, we have a sparkling surface of pure water covering some 600 acres which is alike 'a thing of beauty and joy forever'."

The swamp was also described as that "natural depression" and Withers in his *History of Ballarat* supports the other descriptions, referring to it as "one time alternate swamp and mud or dust hollow".

Eugene Von Guerard speaks of the Black Swamp in his diary. His entry for the 4th August 1852 states: "This morning my mate James and I again shouldered our picks and spades to join a new rush to the neighbourhood of the Black Swamp, there to peg out some claims.

"We found some seventy diggers there, at work, surfacing at a depth of one 1/2 to two feet with very poor results."

On November 6, he records that he went with his friend to get leeches from the swamp to put around his mate's eye, which was



**EARLY DRAWCARD:** French born lithographic draughtsman Francois Cogne's 1859 version of the "swamp".

terribly swollen. His friend waded into the water barefoot "and soon began a vigorous dance among the reeds, his legs being covered with the disgusting things.

"We had much trouble in getting them into the bottle he brought for them."

The first attempt at obtaining drinking water was in December 1852 when men were employed to build a dam across the Gnarr Creek for the Government Camp authorities.

The swamp creek from the lake flowed into the Gnarr behind the present Anglers Hall in Wendouree Pde, however this proposal proved unsatisfactory and the creek was referred to the "Gnarrsty Creek".

Lake water was conveyed to the city by a nine inch pipe which was laid underground and carried the water down Webster

St, along Drummond to Sturt and then to the "Water Works" near the intersection with Lydiard St.

The lake water was then sold by licensed carters. Kirk's Dam superceded this system in 1862 and after the completion of the Gong Reservoir water was carried to the lake as well as the city.

This enabled the lake level to be controlled and alleviated the fear that the lake would run dry, which was a concern.

View Point was the scene of a large stone quarry after 1862 and another quarry was at the site of the present St Patrick's boatshed.

An early picket fence around the lake which enclosed a cyprus hedge was erected by prisoners from the jail who were marched up Eyre St daily.

By 1874 Lake Wendouree was described as the finest inland water in the colony.

Double-decker horse trams

began carrying passengers to the lake and gardens in 1887 and horses and trams were housed at the depot in Wendouree Pde on the north shore.

At the turn of the 20th century the lake was a social highlight.

*Ballarat and Vicinity* noted: "The people of Ballarat are noted lovers of all classes of aquatic sports, as evidenced by the handsome boat-houses and numerous jetties that line the shore, and the hundreds of pleasure boats that throng the waters of Wendouree.

"A fine line of steam pleasure craft is constantly at the service of the public to convey them to all places of interest around the lake, the beautifully laid out botanical gardens on its western shore being the objective point of each and all."

CORRIGAN  
18/3/06

# The lake: it's a dry argument



## ROOM FOR A VIEW

By Wayne Rigg\*

HERE has been much healthy debate, comment and speculation about Lake Wendouree in recent times.

I want to make it clear that I support the long-term strategy of filling the Lake with water from the Ballarat North Water Treatment Plant, and using this treated wastewater for our parks, gardens, ovals, and industry. However, there are many factors to be considered.

Our region is in its ninth year of below-average rainfall and the only thing that will fix the lake immediately is rain, and lots of it.

Many options have been looked at and the Paul's Drain

the community to have its say, and then for the council to have a formal resolution, has not occurred. I do not support the use of drinking water to top up the lake.

The notion of asking farmers in the Moorabool catchment area to donate unused water entitlements is one which I am sure the majority of farmers have laughed at. This water is used for their livelihoods and it is unreasonable to ask them to donate it to Ballarat to "save some weeds in a swamp".

The council is now going to contact farmers via Southern Rural Water and seek to buy excess water entitlements to offset the 150 megalitres of water being put into the lake by CHW — another decision that the council has not formally debated or budgeted.

While I understand the science and rationale behind the argument of keeping the lake weed alive, this is premised on the findings of the Lake Wendouree Water Supply Options Report. The council has only just received this



**INFLOW:** Water runs into Lake Wendouree last week for the first time in years as the valves are opened to add 150 megalitres in an attempt to keep the aquatic life alive.

who bears them for future upgrades of the plant? Can the council secure environmental flows into Burrumbeet Creek? Will the water be available at a fixed rate for years to come, or will the cost increase as Ballarat comes to rely on the only sustainable supply of water available to the lake?

The State Government's \$2 million for the project is welcomed, however this means if the project is to proceed both the council and CHW need to find their share of the costs.

The council will have to either increase revenue (ie rates) to pay for its portion, or something in the budget will simply have to fall off the list. CHW may have to do the same.

The council is yet to determine what the actual and ongoing burden to ratepayers will be, and this is something that people deserve to know and discuss before a decision.

The Lake Wendouree Water Options Supply Report is Minister The Hon. ... and

drinking water, along with the natural values, recreational pursuits and lifestyles that came and went with the water over the past nine years.

I believe it is very irresponsible of the council to commit to a project without knowledge of what implications this has for all of the city's ratepayers now and into the future.

JSC F8 015

Attract more interest.