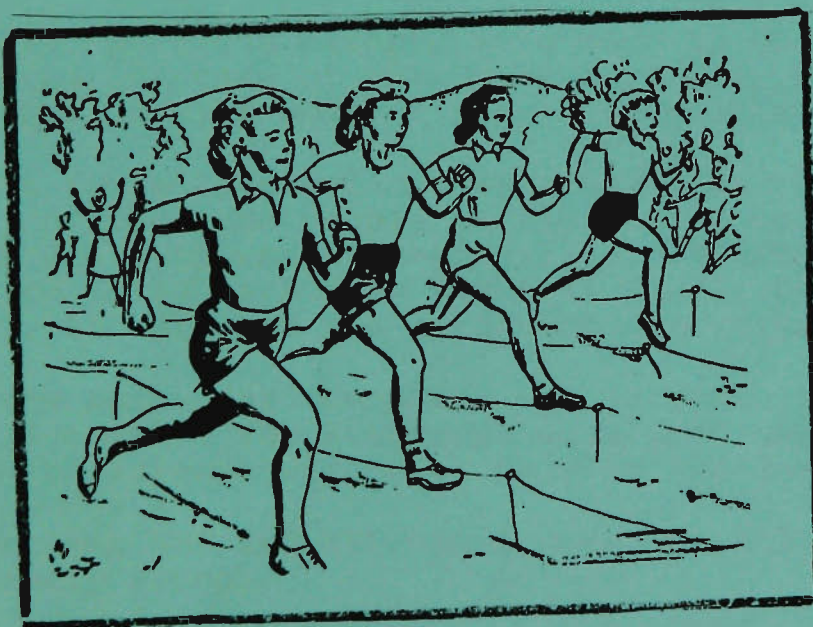


CROW - BOX 27 - 26/15 - DOC 1

The Workers' Sports Federation

in the late 1930s



Some of Ruth Crow's Memories

These memories were written in reply to a request from
Drew Cottle, University of Western Sydney

(There are no documents about the WSF in the Crow Collection
but there are a few documents about the Eureka League and
Junior Eureka League in the late 1940s and early 1950s)

Dr Drew Cottle,
University of Western Sydney
Macarthur PO Box 555
Campbelltown, 2560

Jan 1995

Dear Drew,

Enclosed are a few memories about the Workers Sports Federation. Jocka Burns will probably be able to tell you about the way the Unemployed Workers Union helped men (and women too, perhaps ?!) to gain skills (see Frank Huelin.. "Keep Moving"). The "WSF advance guard" was mainly composed of UWU and students.

Here are a few explanations. I have no experience of the early camps. By the time I went it's organisation was well established.

I have mentioned that the tented streets were clean and sometimes decorated.. that would have been with gum leaves and messages etc. There was a competition for the best street or area etc (I think). There was a "vigilanties" group which looked after the morals of campers... inspecting site after lights out etc... I think there was no drunkenness or uncouth behaviour. In any case my generation of young people could not afford liquor.

I know that conscious efforts were made to befriend the "locals" and a special feature of the Daylesford Camp was the New Years Eve celebration with some of the towns people.

The Eureka Youth League Camps were based on the WSF experience with many of the same people participating in their organisation. The first EYL Camp was at Healesville, Christmas.. New Year 1944 to 1945 (or could have been the next year). By Dec 1945 (or could be 1946 ?) the EYL had its permanent Camp site at Yarra Junction.

I think the Daylesford Camp was the largest. There were 2000 campers (I think). The EYL camps were much smaller, possibly 700 would be the largest with most only in the low hundreds.

The campers at WSF and EYL camps were not all young, but were predominantly young.

Note, nearly all the campers at the WSF camps and the first couple of EYL camps depended on the WSF for transport (special trains/ then walk) to the camp, and for tent accommodation (they could not transport their own). Once at the camp they were mainly dependent on the camp for entertainment. By the mid 1950s an increasing proportion of EYL campers had cars... much more coming and going,... not staying for the full program etc.... much more seeking entertainment outside the camp.. eg at the hotel.

A small number of campers still go to Camp Eureka. .

I think Victoria was the only state that had any such organisation as the WSF. It would be interesting to seek the reasons for this.



(1)

The Workers' Sport Federation

Ruth Crow, January 1995

The Healesville Camp Christmas to New Year 1936/37.

I think it was a little way out of ~~Healesville~~^{Warburton} not far from Chum Creek. (It may have been Warburton I am not sure whether it was Warburton or Healesville but no doubt you can check this). ^{It may Warburton}

There seemed to be many hundreds of people in streets of tents with a central area for the big marquee for meals, a tent for doctors (medical students).. lots of young children who were kept hilariously occupied in mob games organised by Eric Ogden. There was also a "lonely Hearts Club" which attracted a lot of teenagers etc.... in other words there seemed to be lots of things organised in and around the camp. I can't recall any organised sport but the whole thing was so exciting for me (to be away from home etc with my "boy friend" for the first time). Maurie and I did go for some walks so we did not spend all our time at the camp.

My main impression was the wonderful good will and cheery welcome. There was a great storm and mud was every where and lots of people got dysentery (including us) but cheerfulness was not lost...anyhow that's how I remember the first camp I went to

Cowes Easter 1937.

We travelled by special trains and then across in the ferry. Everyone sung. There were streets of tents and they were named after "working class heroes". The "streets" were all kept clean and some were decorated. I have clear memories of the play place for the little children (a creche)... a sports ground with sports activity organised all the time (or so it seemed)... a big outdoor gymnasium (Roman rings, horizontal bars, a gym.horse)...a brass band, ...camp newspaper...cycle races ...and fantastic concerts with rosters performing.

We seemed to spend all our time at the "camp". The only time I remember leaving was to follow the band to the wharf to welcome in some of the campers who came up on the Friday morning.

There was a huge storm and everyone helped to lash down the marquee and while we were doing this we sang songs like the Marsellaisetremendous spirit of enjoying co-operation etc... no moaning.

Daylesford, Christmas/ New Year 1937/38

We travelled by special train. On our return trip we danced the Lambeth Walk on the station platform while waiting for the train to arrive.

This was a huge camp. The "advance gaurd" had prepared the site and of particular interest to me was the huge big wall newspaper... or notice board. There were quite a few artists and writers at the Camp. I think the poet Shaw Neilson was there. The

sport was very well organised and included cycling. The concerts were terrific.

The WSF Hike Hostel

Maurie and I were the "wardens" for the WSF Hike Hostel from about 1939 to the beginning of 1942. This hostel was on the very top of Mount Dandenong, next to the Observatory Tearooms. (now called the Sky High Restaurant and quite up market). I suppose I should elaborate on this.

Maurie and I managed the Observatoroty Tearooms from 1939 to 1942 and we helped the WSF establish the hostel. They bought the land and had working bees to build a store shed in which they stored tents. We supplied meals and space for socialising. Meals were an evening meal and breakfast and a cut lunch each of which costs one shilling (I think.. anyhow it was very cheap)...In the evening we would have a dance/social in the tearooms,...see the article attached.

In the mid 1930s the Victorian National Fitness Council was trying to popularise youth hostels but not many were established. The one at Mt Dandenong and the other one at Monbulk (also run by fairly "progressive people" but mainly commecial) are the only two I know about.

Late in 1941 I attended a meeting to plan the WSF camp for that year but the plans were cancelled when Japan came into the war. Hurrel Waten (Judah Waten's wife) was one of the people at this last meeting of the WSF.

People I Remember. Alex Opie (the main "anchor" organiser). Eric Ogden... (the main charismatic character), Peter Vlass (the accordian player), Doreen and Alf Lorbach (the gymnasists), Ken Miller (the camp newspaper), Egal White (the camp doctor.. medical student), Charles Silver (sports organiser), Gus Haddon (sports organiser).

The only ones that I know who are still living are Charles Silver and Doreen Lorbach. Charles would not now remember anything but his wife Olga may and she may know others, for example her brother and sisters used to go to the Camps. Vic has given you her address I think. Doreen's address is 54 Dickenson St. Glenroy, 3046. 03.306 2874.(but please do not mention me to her.) (Note added April 1996 :- Charles has since died, but his wife Olga now lives at the Old Colonist Homes in North Fitzroy. Also Alex Opie is alive and now lives at Mallacootta.)

Some of the hikers were Nancy Irving (nee Smith), Sol Marks (41 Karwarp St. McLeod, 3085 03 459. 1207) and Vic Marks 25 McNamara St., West Mc Leod, 3085 03 457 1612.

I don't have Nancy's address but you could write to her C/o the Union of Australian Women, Ross House, 247 Flinders Lane Melb 3000. She is related to Grace Gale (Vic's NZ friend)..

Audrey Blake in Sydney may have some information but I think she is not well at the moment so I won't pass on her address..

Ruth Crow

**The Clothing Trade Union
and
The Workers Sports Federation.**

An Addition to the other two pages.

As the name implies the WSF was a "workers" organisation. The following information about its connections with a trade union is based on very flimsy evidence, nevertheless it does indicate where some research could be done etc.

Gus Haddon was an organiser of the Clothing Trade Union. In the early 1930s he was the main person responsible for organising a very extensive network of women's basket ball (netball) teams, based on women workers in clothing and textile factories. Some teams came to the WSF Camps.

Even in the 1950s some of the teams kept names like "Berlie" (the corset factory but I can't spell it, it is not now in telephone directory !!) or "Holeproof", or "Yakka" although, perhaps, none of their 1950 players would have worked in those factories. (I know there was a Berlie team in 1957, playing A or B grade, but not sure of the others)

It is important to note that Melbourne was the centre of clothing industry in Australia at this time. The word "woman" included people who were 14 and 15, there were many many more youth in the factories. Also, I think (but have no real information to back up my thought) that there was a considerable expansion of textile and clothing factories in the early 30s, For example Myers, Morleys were established and Holeproof greatly expanded. Another contributing factor would be the increase in benevolent bosses... (some Jewish) and the beginning by factory owners of a recognition of the factory : "caring for workers". For example, Holeproof used to have billboard in Brunswick (where the factory was located) advertising "Let your daughter work at Holeproof for her health sake": and it pictured the welfare nurses (Pompey Elliot's daughter by the way)... Look here, I don't know if Holeproof had a WSF team, I am just trying to indicate some of the "feel" of the period.

A women who was very significant in WSF sport was Eileen Kennedy, known as "Mac". She was a real amazon and much involved in athletics. She was the starter for women's athletics for many years and I think was one of the starters for the Melbourne Olympics. She was a very significant character in Port/South Melbourne well into the 1970s when she was still involved with the Life Saving Club. Tom Hills, if prompted, may give you more information about her or she may still be alive.

Eileen also organised sports teams to perform (dance or sing etc) at the local picture theatres before the film was screened raising money etc... building up local loyalties. Probably this was not directly connected with WSF. From about 1950 Eileen was not involved in anything I was involved in. (The end, so far !)

Dear Drew,

Autumn 1995

Thanks for your letter.

You ask :-

"Did the EYL simply supercede the WSF ?

The straight answer is no it did not. The WSF was discontinued at the beginning of the Second World War and the EYL camps were not held until at least 1944. The EYL camps were different in many ways from the WSF. They were permanent camp sites and young people learnt many building skills on work bees, there was less emphasis on competitive sport, more emphasis on international friendship and world peace, more students.... discussion etc.

Part of the base of WSF was the sports groups in factories organised through the Trade Unions (Eg Clothing Trades and Gus Haddon see previous letter to you). Before Second World War there was a much higher proportion of unskilled young workers (particularly women) as compared to the 1940s the rise in the retention rates at schools, (youth had sport at school not at work place)the employment of adult migrants in unskilled jobs formerly performed by young people..and the earlier marriage age... also rapid suburbanisation... all this eroded the base for the WSF type of organisation In any case the car and family holiday based on the car would have really killed the sort of camp provided by WSF, (a feature of which was the hiring of whole trains for transport and the provision of tents ready erected) as The car-way-of-life did eventually contribute to the demise of Camp Eureka when youth as well as parents could afford cars.

Thus the EYL camps were quite a different type from WSF.. a different period. There were some of the WSF stalwarts at EYL camps... mostly these helped with some of the trades-people's jobs... electric wiring, drainage etc the permanent campsite took a lot of maintaining (the former WSF people had an auxillary type of relationship)... but the actual running of the camp etc was by young people who had a different style from the WSF period.

You state :-

"That the WSF was largely a Victorian movement even though the EYL was not"

Some answers to this may be found in two directions,,, Victoria has always been in the forefront of political activity on social issues as distinct from industrial issues. I have theories on this but cannot elaborate here. Also in Victoria there was a strong Socialist Sunday School which held family camps and bush picnics, (See notes by Amirah Inglis in the introduction to Lloyd Edmond's "Letters from Spain"... Lloyd, who died in Sept 1994, often talked about these times).

In addition in Victoria there was a tradition of artists colonies and the strong emphasis on culture in the WSF attracted this type of supporter. Added to this was the self-help groups developed around Mildura and other country towns by the unemployed... See "Keep Moving" by Frank Huelin or interview Jocka Burns.

Your comment that :-

"Nevertheless, in Germany, Austria and England prior to the advent of Hitler and the Spanish Civil War, especially in the period 1928 to 1932, enormous worker sporting organisations flourished".

This is well worth pursuing. I think a study of the socialist hiking organisations and sports clubs under the Weimar Republic would be quite revealing. Also the role of the youthful Anti-fascist Jews in Australia... there was a high proportion of young Jewish people at WSF camps...early multi-culturalism. The Jewish Youth organised hikes through the Dandenongs with great enthusiasm, and much singing and dancing. I have quite clear memories of groups of them stopping overnight at the hostel we hosted in the late 1930s.

I cannot think of anyone who lived in the Weimar Republic (and who was involved in WSF) etc who is now in Australia and who could help you. You may have to rely on reports and novels, and garbled memories etc. Some German novels which helped give me a picture of life in central Europe after the First World War.. "The Kaiser Goes but the Generals Remain", "From White Cross to Red Flag", "Little Man What Now ?" I can't remember the authors and probably the novels were romanticised, but may be worth glancing through.... Recently I read "Weimar Culture" by Peter Gay (Harper Torchbooks, 1970) which I found a useful background on pre Hitler history. Some of the Left Book Club publications (published by Gollancz) may also be useful. Some of the documents from the Spanish Republic did show how that Government provided holidays for workers' families etc... these certainly inspired me in 1936

In the late 1930s the League of Young Democrats included in its policy what was called the BYO...ie work amongst the Bourgeois Youth Organisations... Maurie's (Crow) and my role as youth hostel wardens was seen by us as one way of helping the BYO and thus building the united front amongst the BYO. I know this is much later than the pre-Hitler days...

Although this is mainly from my memory etc I would be grateful if the Crow Collection at the Victoria University of Technology was given recognition rather than me personally.

I don't know the scope of your project etc but hope it includes the efforts of the left around the United Front Against War and Fascism.... pursuing every avenue. It always amazes me how quickly the left, and young people in particular, here (in Australia) got on to the key issue of building the United Front and the Peoples Front, and how the left educated people through the study circles, book discussions etc. and of course social and sporting activities including the WSF.

Greetings from

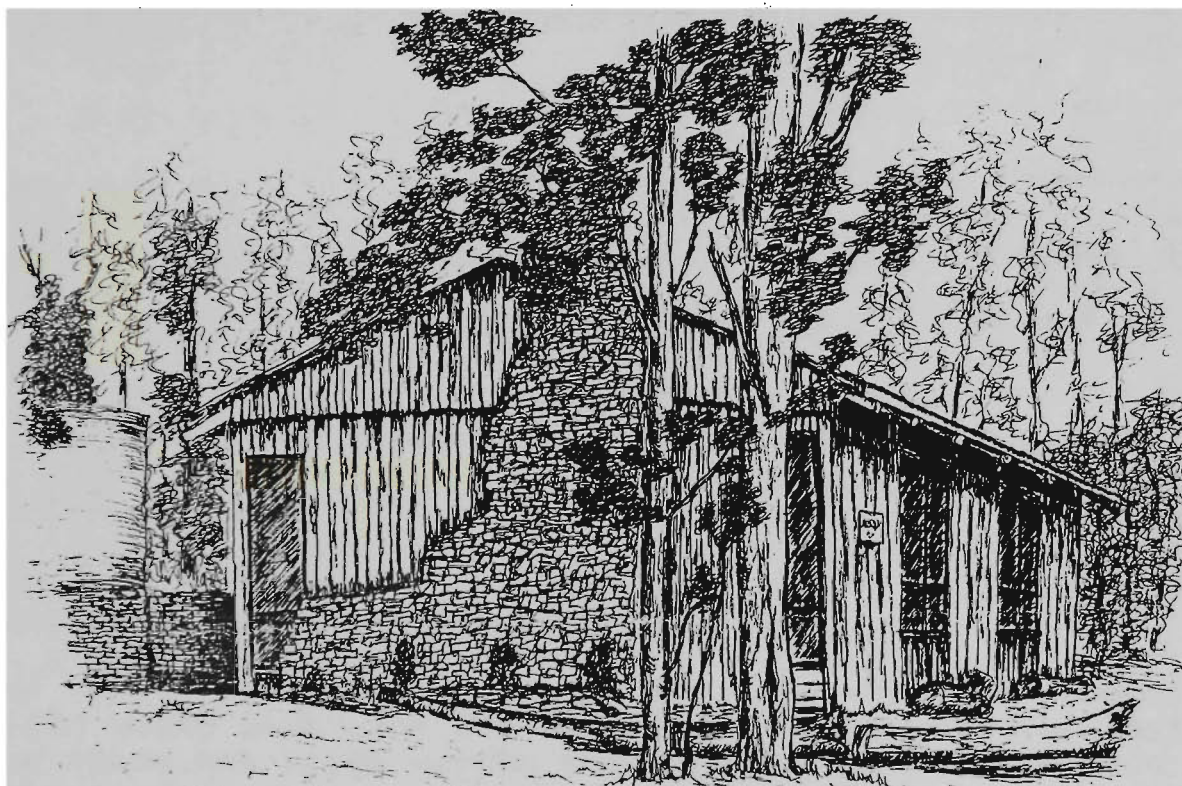
Ruth Crow

Alex Opie - a very significant W.S.F. person, lives in Mallaacoba. Nancy Young (UAW) has his address - 1996

First notice April May 1996

CAMP EUREKA

50TH ANNIVERSARY REUNION



Australia Day Sunday January 26, 1997
10am to 10pm

100 Tarrango Rd, Yarra Junction Victoria

The camp is still there and getting better thanks to the enormous efforts of the Camp Eureka Working Collective which has been working on the Camp since 1974. Once again Camp Eureka is a fully functioning camp for hire at low cost to groups who respect its unique environment, purpose and history.

THE REUNION ON 26TH JAN; WORK CAMP 4TH TO 12TH JAN

We need your help. Spread the word. Write to the camp for more detailed leaflets. Include donation of stamps. Contact us with ideas and memorabilia. Join the Melbourne Organising Committee. Further information & donations.

Elaine (03) 3309 6640 Marie AH (03) 9497 2130

Over the Hills and Far Away. ! *Written by Pete Cerriggs in Ecoso Newsletter*

BUSH WALKING IN THE 1940S - Contributed by Eureka

"Do you long to be up and away ? Then ride a BSA !" (Footnote 1.)
This was the catchcry of a 1930s poster which showed a young couple on a hill top. Few youths could afford to respond, but it was not so expensive to heed another poster. This showed a young woman with an armful of wattle catching a train. It's V.R. slogan was "Travel by train to the hills !" (Footnote 2)

One of the daily newspapers ran regular mystery hikes when whole train loads of people travelled on cheap excursion tickets to where the metropolis ended and the country began. ..to Ferntree Gully, Eltham, Blackburn, Hurstbridge, Ringwood, Diamond Creek, Asburton and other outer suburban stations to enjoy sauntering and singing along the country roads.

In the 1940s two day hikes became possible when hike hostels provided cheap overnight accommodation. These were the days before there was light weight camping gear so hostels were essential.

A popular hostel was on the top of Mt Dandenong. The usual two day hike started with a train trip to Croydon early on Saturday afternoon (Footnote 3). Most of the 7 to 8 miles to the top of range was along the main road but usually the intrepid hikers would scramble up the Old Coach Road from Montrose. (footnote 4)

Hikers were rostered to prepare the meals. Dancing and singing were the expected evening entertainment. The next day's walk would be 10 to 12 miles ending up at Ferntree Gully or Bayswater.

Footnotes :-1. BSA was a brand of a very popular motor bike.2. This Victorian Railways poster showed no recognition of the need to protect the bush. 3. Many workers had to work on Saturday morning so the two day walks were really only for a day and a half. 4. The Crow Collection has no written information about the hike hostels but several Collection supporters (Ecoso subscribers) can provide oral information on hostel hiking in the 1940s

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From Ecoso 2/31

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NEWS FROM SAVE THE DANDENONGS LEAGUE

Here is an extract from the most recent issue of "Greenprint" the newsletter of the Save the Dandenongs League :-

"For years Sherbrooke has provided rest and succour to the weary pollution saturated Melburnian. A careful watch on the developmental ambitions of interested parties in Sherbrooke has resulted in maintaining the sensitive balance of civilisation and wild places. To have been able to do this in a materially-orientated Western society is to the credit of the Sherbrooke Council, particularly over the past 20 years.

Very soon Sherbrooke as a Council will be no more. At the very best we can hope for amalgamation resulting in a Dandenong Ranges Shire which will have restrictions along the lines of the current Sherbrooke Shire.

At worst the adjacent shires could absorb what is now Sherbrooke Shire into themselves. Should this happen, then development resulting in housing density will sprawl continuously as far as the Great Dividing Range."

Currently the Save the Dandenongs League is campaigning against housing in the Lysterfield Valley.

(For more information contact Eureka on phone 752.1064).