

Email to: (Jason Dowling, originator of "Groundhog Day" article in Sunday Age, 29 Nov 2015 jdowling@fairfaxmedia.com.au)

Cc: Lisa Neville (Vic State Environment Minister):

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Greg Hunt (Fed Minister for Environment, and Fed member for Flinders):

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Point Nepean National Park Ranger Team:

OCS Alumni: admin@ocsportsea.com

OTU Scheyvillians: webmaster@otu.asn.au

Re: Article Sunday Age 29 Nov 2015 "It's Groundhog Day at Point Nepean Park"

G'Day Jason,

I'm Bob de Haas, founder of the Officer Cadet School Portsea Alumni (OCS Portsea Alumni), and webmaster of the www.ocsportsea.com website, currently in major redevelopment. The OCS Alumni is a major stakeholder in the development of the Point Nepean National Park.

I'm a graduate of the Class of December 1967 (at the time of the Prime Minister Holt's disappearance). In my career, I rose to Lieutenant Colonel, saw service in South Vietnam as an Infantry Platoon Commander, later raised the first Army Counter Terrorist Unit in Townsville in 1978 (after the Sydney Hilton bombing), and eleven months later, subsequently handed over the CT tasks to the SAS CT Squadron, several of my younger officers joining that unit and continuing their CT training and tasks.

I was a Captain instructor (Advanced Field Training Wing) at the National Service Officer Training Unit Scheyville (OTU Scheyville) in the two years prior to National Service being abolished and the OTU being closed and..... unfortunately abandoned, and mostly demolished. I mention this in particular because the "Scheyvillians", graduates of the OTU, are a very tightly knit group and, since then, no longer really have an Alma Mater, from which most of the graduates freely admit their "careers began". Two prominent graduates, you may recall, are Tim Fischer, and Jeff Kennett.

As a result of seeing this happen at the time, when the Federal Government wanted to hand over the Point Nepean area to the Victoria Government, I immediately became a "member" of the then formed "caretaker" group, the Point Nepean Community Trust, to add my endeavours to secure the Alma Mater for the OCS Portsea Graduates. The Trust which, with a few generous donations, was able to reasonably restore the older structures that once were the Quarantine Station and later the Officer Cadet School. The OCS, in the period 1952 to 1985 graduated more than 3000 young Army Officers, bearing in mind the actual entry numbers were far higher as the annual attrition rate was sometimes horrendous. Staff numbers (most specifically selected) were considerable throughout the period.

Graduates of the OCS have included past Chiefs of Defence, Chiefs of Army, and a past Chief of New Zealand Army, who currently is Governor General of New Zealand. Graduates of other nationalities have also risen to extremely high ranks - Malaysia, Singapore, Papua New Guinea, Philippines, Fiji, to name a few. The OCS Portsea, is still the **only officer producing establishment** that has produced a Victoria Cross recipient (Major Peter Badcoe, VC) (KIA in South Vietnam), since Sir Roden Cutler. A number of other graduates have also been killed in action (KIA), in various conflicts since the School was established.

The fine work of the Point Nepean Community Trust managed to achieve "Heritage" status for much of the Quarantine Station/Officer cadet School, thus securing lasting structures that ensure the OCS Portsea Alumni have a lasting Alma Mater (unlike the demolished site of the OTU, Scheyville), which is visited many times a year by graduate classes holding reunions, and visitations by their families and friends. The Rangers at the Park have sought us out on a constant basis to provide "interpretations" of the area - which we obviously can, and justifiably take great pride in, while we still live. The Rangers, individually and as a group, freely admit the ambience of the area is indeed beautiful, historical, mysterious, and absolutely unlike any other National Park in Australia.

Reports from the Rangers are that the Park visitors are extremely interested in the military aspects of the Park, not only the OCS, but also the old battlements at the end of the Peninsular, and constantly ask about living and training conditions in the area.

Unfortunately, being granted heritage listing, the area is extremely expensive to maintain....but worth it, as the park is truly unique in Australia. There is absolutely no other National Park that has such an outlook, such a diverse variety of flora and fauna, historical buildings, and personal histories.

So, the question remains - how to pay for the very expensive on-going maintenance of the area and its structures. I acknowledge that the local community groups are keenly interested in being able to call the Park "their's", but the area is most definitely more for the Nation, the State, and interstate and international visitors - which obviously will benefit the "locals", if not the "retired gentry", but certainly the local businesses along the Peninsular. I would question the reliance on "small" or "smaller" leases being granted, providing only a comparative pittance to the coffers of maintenance. Some much "grander" proposals are required - that would draw much larger crowds, national and international. The previous Victorian Govt granted a lease to developers of a very seriously attractive Health Spa environment based on the underground flow of mineral springs through the area. Such a venture would not only occasion "spin off" smaller leases that would enhance the total environment, but would have a greater potential to attract investors in re-furbishing and utilizing existing accommodation buildings and restaurant/kitchens, providing a greater incentive for tourist or corporate use of the facilities, further adding to the potential of increased funding for maintenance of the area, so that it would not have to be so reliant on State Government funding.

I would suggest some research into the actual cost of maintenance, before any decisions are made for the granting of leases. And that these leases more than adequately provide for the maintenance funding. However, I'm afraid reliance on such "small leases" would not adequately provide anywhere near the level of funding required for maintenance, which would mean an extra ongoing impost on State "public" funds.

Jason - unfortunately (but fortunately for me), I sold up in Vermont South, Melbourne last year and moved to Bribie Island, Qld. I still remain in contact with the Ranger Team, and will be visiting them in the couple of weeks prior to Christmas. I'm happy for you to contact me at any time regarding the ongoing

situation of the Point Nepean National Park.

You can also be assured that the Alumni, families and friends will vigorously have input into the future of the Point Nepean National Park.

Sincere regards,

Bob

Robert (Bob) de Haas

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PS: I would be very surprised if many (perhaps most) members of the Alumni (which encompasses all graduates, non-graduates and staff of the OCS from 1952 to 1985), would be severely disappointed and dismayed that such an **"invasion of" and "blatant disrespect"** has been displayed by ratbags displaying their sign "Bugger Off", on the sacred ground called the **"Parade Ground"**. If you do not know the significance of this, please research. The past Parade Ground is formally acknowledged in the "interpretations" of the area and I'm sure the Rangers also would have been dismayed.