

# ESCARPMENT

## ENVIRONMENT VS DEVELOPMENT

### COMMUNITY VS. CORPORATION

### FUTURE VS. PAST

Turning off Mt. Ousley road and heading over to the lookout, I could be driving down any one-lane country road in the state - the kind of road where you have to either shift constantly between third and fourth gear to get up and down and round the bends, or just sit in fourth and labour the whole way, making the engine temperature rise while you go up, and easing it back down when you ride the brakes into a corner. There are no cars coming in the opposite direction, which is a good thing because it's my first time up here and I keep underestimating my speed into the corners, drifting slightly onto the third of the road that's left on my right.

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16th Century Europe - The Great Syphilis Epidemic : The only cure for this epidemic is mercury. Mercury treatment leads to nasal degeneration, for which there is no known treatment.

OR :

Today's solution may be tomorrows problem.

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You couldn't tell from up here, but this whole thing is getting fucked up and out of control - I got a look at a list of the developments proposed for the escarpment area, (that big green mass that stretches from as far as you can see north to as far as you can see south, that means a few hours less sunset every afternoon). Two double pages made clear somewhere between 13 to 15 sites along that strip which have been marked down for development - mines, housing estates, a leagues club... they all have one thing in common - they'll make money. They'll make money for some greedy mutha-fucka from Sydney who doesn't give a shit about laws, people or the environment, but will do anything for that great lowest common denominator; money. He sits in his office or on his verandah every day, masturbating to the thought of culling a rain forest and putting in the worlds biggest casino, and then employing the locals to work twelve hours a day for forty-five cents a week. He finishes the ritual with a Cuban cigar - they all smoke Cuban's, even though their fathers dobbed in their neighbours for being filthy Commie's - and he walks off to find his wife, pretending that rape isn't polygamy, with sweat rolling down to the smile on his face.

It's sad from up here at the top of it all, looking down on the great balance between an urban life and a natural world, that there are some people so concerned with themselves in the here and the now, that they'll sacrifice the future for a mansion on the north shore and a dirty Nazi BMW. Without thinking about the consequences of the present, the future can so easily get fucked up and rendered useless to anyone. These development sites are wrong

for so many reasons, ranging from being built on endangered flora and fauna, to being known flood plains, from being sacred Aboriginal sites, to being geotechnically unstable. The future is no one's property, and the present belongs to us all, but there are a handful amongst us who have claimed the lot for themselves, and they are willing to do anything to ensure the future is how they planned it - lots of money, little time.

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It's hard to remain hopeful in a time like this - nothing has any value except for money. No one has anything in common with anyone else, and we go about our day to day lives without noticing who sits next to us on the bus, or who we saw wrapped around a tree in their car on the side of the road. When all sense of community has gone, where can you turn to find help and hope?

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THE PARK IS AN EXAMPLE OF TRUE COMMUNITY SERVICE - (plaque at the top of Mt. Keira lookout, est. 1951).

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Where has the community gone that built this place? Where are those that thought it necessary to preserve this environment for their grandchildren? While I'm thinking about launching a missing persons report with the police, knowing that they would never take me seriously - who misplaces an entire community for the best part of a half century and then comes looking for them dressed in a pair of shorts, barefooted, and with cigarette burns in his t-shirt? - I suddenly remember a place where I'd heard of something resembling community minded behaviour.

I reach the Sandon Point Aboriginal Tent Embassy just after dark. The walk from the train station winds through the affluent neighbourhoods of Thirroul, towards the beach and round a bend to the smell of a campfire. The faces I meet are hidden in the shadows of tent annexes, but each one has a name and extends a hand.

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Sitting around the fire listening to stories of how everyone in the area has lent a hand - “We got back the other day and all this water was just there, and I said ‘Where did this come from?’, so we figured it must have come from one of the locals.” - and seeing the faces of the children from up the road, who came down with their father

to say g'day, as they play with the Aboriginal children, I feel that not everything is at a loss. There is still some hope, even in the time of corruption and greed in this country. A time when the rich and powerful feel it their duty to keep the rest of the population subdued with half arsed compromises and fake tradeoffs.

The people that come here are as varied as in any place in the country. All races, religions and sexes are here. People drift in whenever they can, and out when they have to. The reasons they come are different, except for the fact that they want to save the point. Some are locals who don't want an eye-sore in their front yards. Some are students who fight for any good cause. Some are environmentalists who are concerned about the endangered species that will be lost if the development goes ahead. But they all have one thing in common - this development is fucked. Personal preferences have been put aside for the greater good of the site, and this...this makes me feel like there is something in this world worth fighting for. Just a quick look through the visitors book makes me realise that this struggle is a community struggle, and suddenly, I find myself right smack bang in the beautiful, unified middle of the group of people I'd spent the afternoon mourning the loss of.

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What happens when a group of animals is gone? Who takes their place? They served a function for god knows how many thousands or millions of years, and then they're gone. Their function is still necessary to maintain the balance of nature, but they aren't around to fulfil it. If the worms and bugs all died out, what would the birds feed on? Would they start to come after us? Huge hoards of birds cruising around the earth looking to kill and eat every human that came their way, dressed in leather, bearing chains. Would the power go to their heads? Would they try and install a fascist bird regime, where we serve them - put in cages and pitted against each other for their entertainment, cultivated as a source of food, put in huge fields to farm cuttle-fish? The possibilities are horrific...who knows what could happen? The key, I think - the easiest answer - is to stop fucking with the environment. Once we've murdered it, things will get nasty. I don't need a degree in Environmental Science to tell me that I don't like birds picking my eyes out.

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With the closing of a month that's seen the country's political power again shift between Liberal and Labor I've realised how important it is to fight - they will never have a difference in policy, and the constant struggle between the two exists only for the sake of their bankrolls. Nothing can ever change if they merely object to each other without offering a true alternative. The path of the future is not about minimising our impact, but rectifying the fuck-ups of the past, and until something radical happens, this will never happen. Kill the Prime Minister, and abolish Liberal and Labor - we all know they're both corrupt as fuck anyway, unless we've spent our lives with our heads up our own arses. And get out and do something that might be for good. Apathy kills, and so do corporations - I've got no time for either.

Tim Cahill