

POSTER PROMOTES

wildlife sanctuary

POSTER PROMOTES WILDLIFE SANCTUARY

In the 1950s a family outing or day trip was a common weekend event, and in Victoria, the Sir Colin MacKenzie Sanctuary – also known as the Healesville Sanctuary – sixty-odd kilometres from Melbourne, was a popular destination.

The Museum has recently acquired an old travel poster, published by Victoria Rail, promoting the Sanctuary as a tourist destination ‘to which you go by Train and Local Bus’. A quirky piece of memorabilia in its own right, the travel poster provides a valuable link between Sir Colin MacKenzie and the role which the Sanctuary played in the founding of the Museum, through the Australian Institute of Anatomy wet specimen collection.

William Colin MacKenzie was born on 9 March 1877 in Victoria. He graduated with a Bachelor of Medicine from the University of Melbourne in 1898, and in 1903 went to Europe for further study. At the same time, a severe polio epidemic broke out in Australia, and MacKenzie took advantage of his location to visit the leading orthopaedic centres in England and Germany to study their methods.

On his return to Melbourne, MacKenzie devised a systematic treatment method for polio which was, at that time, quite controversial. He eventually set up as an orthopaedic consultant on Collins Street until the outbreak of war, when he again set off for England, working at the Royal College of Surgeons and assisting with cataloguing war wounds.

Upon returning to Australia in 1918, MacKenzie converted part of his lodgings into a laboratory and museum, which he named the Australian Institute of Anatomical Research, and undertook further investigation into the anatomy of native fauna.

MacKenzie saw a relationship between the physiology of Australia’s wildlife and the human body. This was a contentious field, arising as it did from social Darwinist theory, yet MacKenzie’s research yielded some undeniable benefits. From observing the reaching capacity of the koala and using detailed dissections of koala shoulders, MacKenzie had designed a unique shoulder splint which served as a treatment for sufferers of infantile paralysis. The splint held the arm out from the side of the chest, helping to re-educate damaged muscles. The technique was adapted by MacKenzie to treat soldiers with wounds to their upper limbs during the first world war.

In 1921, MacKenzie was granted occupancy of seventy-eight acres of Crown land at Badger’s Creek, Healesville. Thus the Healesville Sanctuary was born, and it was home to many of the animals destined to become wet specimens (animal remains preserved in formaldehyde).

It may seem ironic that one of Australia’s early advocates of conservation became famous for dissecting native fauna, and

that the institution which now bears his name is a wildlife sanctuary! MacKenzie was, however, a staunch advocate for the conservation of native fauna, and his collection served to highlight the uniqueness of Australia’s animals.

During Healesville’s heyday as a research station, two taxidermists worked full-time preparing and setting up specimens, and MacKenzie’s research attained fame in scientific circles worldwide. The anatomical specimens were so highly regarded that the Smithsonian Institution in Washington offered MacKenzie £100,000 for the collection. MacKenzie refused the offer, wanting the work to remain in Australia.

In 1923 MacKenzie offered the collection to the government, and in 1924 an Act was passed establishing the National Museum of Australian Zoology. It was envisaged that this museum would be established in Canberra, and would comprise MacKenzie’s gift and subsequent additions. The proposed museum was renamed the Australian Institute of Anatomy in 1931, once the building to house the collection was completed (it is now the home of the National Film and Sound Archive). In 1985 the Institute closed and its collection, including the original MacKenzie specimens, was transferred to the National Museum of Australia.

In 1927 MacKenzie vacated the premises at Healesville, and most of the animals were transferred to Melbourne Zoo. MacKenzie had suggested that the research station be combined with surrounding bushland to create a National Park. In 1934 the Healesville Sanctuary was opened as a tourist attraction, in a joint project between the local Shire Council and a committee of local citizens. Animals were reintroduced into the bush habitat from a variety of locations, including possums from Fitzroy Gardens in Melbourne, koalas from Phillip Island, and emus and kangaroos from the Royal Zoological Society.

The State government took over responsibility for Healesville in the late 1940s, and, by the time of the publication of the Healesville Sanctuary travel poster, Healesville was a popular site for day trippers. Healesville is now marketed as one of Victoria’s ‘Three Great Zoos’, providing naturalistic encounters with the native wildlife that once so fascinated MacKenzie.

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The
Animals
Noah forgot

including the Platypuses which are fed at three-thirty



are at



THE SIR COLIN MACKENZIE SANCTUARY

Healesville

to which you

GO BY TRAIN

AND LOCAL BUS

